

First medical textbook in Hindi makes quiet impact

There is nothing to distinguish the tome from hundreds of bulky volumes vying for attention on the bookshelves in this booming town in India's Hindi heartland. But a closer inspection reveals it is a landmark of sorts - the first ever textbook of medicine in Hindi.

The 1,000-page 'Rog Nidan' has practically come as a godsend to medical undergraduates in northern India, who begin their studies with an obvious disadvantage -- they are from Hindi medium institutions.

'The language barrier trips many of these promising pupils into performing poorly in exams,' said S.S.L. Srivastava, who noticed the problem as head of medicine at LLRM Medical College here.

So he took upon himself the task of writing a textbook of medicine in Hindi, though some of his friends and colleagues tried to dissuade him from the daunting if uncertain venture.

The importance of the venture was underscored by S.P. Bajaj, former head of the burns department of the Delhi-based Safdarjung Hospital.

Said Bajaj: 'Though handy books on medical disciplines are available in Hindi, there were no textbooks on medicine in the vernacular.'

Srivastava determined that his textbook should help raw undergraduates negotiate the complexities of clinical landscape, grasp signs and symptoms of illness, show them how to read the pulse, sound heartbeats, palpate the liver, in the comfort of their own mother tongue.

The backbreaking work took him seven years to complete and printing took another year. 'Rog Nidan', launched without fanfare, quietly hit the bookshops in 2007, priced modestly at Rs.500.

But then, word of mouth publicity helped it click with medicos and junior doctors across northern India, particularly in states like Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Haryana. It has already sold over 300 copies.

'Rog Nidan' is detailed and well illustrated with photographs of case histories and diagrams to serve the requirements of both undergraduates and postgraduates.

'The inclusion of a separate Hindi and English index, together with English equivalents of uncommon vernacular terms, has enabled medicos to tackle their papers in English with some confidence,' Srivastava told IANS.

The actual writing of 'Rog Nidan' took four years, proofreading another three and publication one more year. The tome went through six proofs, each stretching to six months.

Fortunately, one of his patients, familiar with thesis and technical work and his handwriting, offered to type all the corrected, voluminous drafts as and when they materialised.

Srivastava did rely on a dictionary of English-Hindi medical terms, but even then as some of the equivalents were not available, he coined them himself.

He could fall back on another equally massive volume, 'Clinical Medicine', in English, which he had written earlier and is now into its second edition.

The idea of attempting a medical textbook, specifically in the Indian context, began to germinate during his student days in the late 1960s, when the text known as Hutchinson dominated the market.

'But the problem with Hutchinson was that it suited European conditions, giving only 50 percent weightage to clinical aspects, emphasising investigations and tests,' Srivastava said.

'One can find ECG or X-ray in an English village, but can you expect such facilities in our countryside? Besides, the case histories and illustrations highlight European conditions, with little relevance to our problems,' he noted.

Srivastava emphasised the clinical aspect, relying more on personal examination and case histories than being overly dependent on expensive tests, except where they are absolutely necessary.

He has also written 'ECG at a Glance', not to mention 37 more publications to his credit on socially relevant themes and poems, with four still under print.

He has been a topper of the Lucknow and Kanpur Universities, having received 12 gold medals for excellence in undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate courses.

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