THE PSYCHIATRY OF THE ASSAILANTS OF THE TAMIL NADU CHIEF MINISTERS

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The mental make up of assassins or assailants of V.I.Ps. especially by persons of impaired mental capacity are of not only inherently interesting from an historical perspective but also of forensic psychiatric value. The attitude towards the care of the criminally mentally ill has been shaped by these incidents.

In the present paper the author examines the mental status of the assailants of three Chief Ministers of Tamilnadu during the last three decades- Rajaji, M.G.R. and Karunanidhi. The assailants were paranoid schizophrenics, catatonic schizophrenic and a malingerer claiming amnesia respectively.

These findings are discussed with reference to the assaults or assassinations of V.I.Ps. of Great Britain and U.S.A.

The royal psychiatric maladies of the past had a profound influence over the course of history; they had a similar influence in changing public attitudes towards mental illness, its treatment especially of the common man in more suitable and human public asylums. The mental illnesses of Henry VI in the fifteenth century and George III in the eighteenth century Great Britain underline these aspects.

The assassins or the assailants of V.I.Ps. especially by persons of impaired mental capacities are not only inherently interesting from an historical perspective but also of forensic psychiatric value. The attitude to the insanity defence in the criminal courts and the attitude towards the care of the criminally mentally ill have been shaped by these incidents.

The case of Daniel MacNaughton who shot at and killed Drummond, the Private Secretary of the British Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel in the mistaken belief that he (MacNaughton) was getting rid of his Prime Minister persecutor in 1843 and his subsequent trial, acquittal and the reference to the House of Lords leading to the formulation of the MacNaughton’s Rule are well known landmarks in forensic psychiatry (West and Walk, 1977). The long reign of Queen Victoria is remarkable for the various assassination attempts. Victoria's seven assailants were generally unprepossessing young men; several were Irish and all but one used pistols. The details of the assaults and the psychiatric status of the assailants could be discerned from Walker (1968). William Gladstone, a Prime Minister of Queen Victoria regarded them as mad men without political motive (Turner, 1990).

Turning to American history, we find that four of the Presidents were assassinated; Abraham Lincoln by Wilkes Booth, Garfield by Guiteau, McKinley by Leon F. Czolgosz and Kennedy by Lee Oswald.

After the independence of India in 1947, three of the Chief Ministers of Tamil Nadu (and
the erstwhile Madras Presidency) were subjected to serious assaults or attempted assaults. It should be interesting to recall some of the facts related to these incidents.

Rajaji was the Chief Minister of the erstwhile Madras Presidency for the second time in 1952. On an earlier period of British India, he was Chief Minister from 1937 to 1939, in the 1960s after he had left the Congress Party, he was living in the Thyagaraya Nagar residence in Madras.

S.R. a tailor had his shop on a nearby unauthorised government waste land. He had been an in-patient at the Government Mental Hospital, Madras, and diagnosed as Paranoid Schizophrenia. He believed he was in the command on an army. He was evicted from his unlawful occupation of government land by the City Police when Rajaji was the Chief Minister. He became deluded that Rajaji was responsible for his eviction. During his stay in the hospital he was seen turning towards in the direction of Rajaji's house and shouting abuses. After his discharge from the hospital, in the 1960s he went to the residence of Rajaji. When he was not allowed to see him by his daughter, he stabbed her with a pair of scissors and tried to enter Rajaji's room. On hearing the shouts of the injured woman, the neighbors rushed in, overpowered him and handed him over to the police. He was found unfit to plead and admitted as a criminally mental ill patient in the criminal ward of the hospital.

With his persecutory delusions still persisting along with some bizarre delusions (he is controlling the seas, etc.) he was returned to the court with a diagnosis of Paranoid Schizophrenia and fit to stand trial. The trial judge found him guilty of causing grievous injury to Rajaji's daughter and attempt to assault Rajaji and not coming under the exemptions provided by the MacNaughton Rules (S.84 I.P.C.). He was given a short period of rigorous imprisonment.

Subsequent to his release from the prison, he is leading a sheltered life under the care of his sister in Madras. He continually maintains a one-way correspondence with Professor Venkoba Rao, who treated him on earlier occasions.

I am thankful to Dr. Rao for placing some of the letters at my disposal. The letters reveal a disorganization of thoughts processes to the extreme besides some disconnected notions about his attempted assault and other delusions. The Psychiatric Social Workers of the Institute visited him and found him advanced in years and spending his time in writing letters to various personalities and leading a sheltered life.

The individual who entered the official chamber of the Chief Minister Dr. M.G. Ramachandran in the Secretariat, Fort St. George, Madras and destroyed furniture, sanitary fittings and records when fortunately the Chief Minister was not there was a former patient of the Institute, treated with drugs and E.C.T. On the present occasion when his mental condition relapsed, he was brought by his relatives to the O.P.D. of the Institute. He managed to elude the grasp of his relatives and was found in the Secretariat that night by the police and
charge sheeted for the attempt to assault the Chief Minister.

As a remand prisoner, he was observed in the O.P.D. and a certificate was issued to the effect that he was suffering from Catatonic Schizophrenia. He was kept in the prison where he recovered after receiving antipsychotic medication. At the time of trial, he was found fit to plead, the psychiatric expert testimony was not called for and he was given a short period of penal servitude.

The third individual threw a chisel at Mr. M. Karunanidhi, the former Chief Minister and the then Leader of Opposition while he was entering his propaganda van after addressing a public meeting. Fortunately the missile struck the door of the van. He was remanded to police custody where he pleaded amnesia for the episode.

The accused was examined at the Tirunelveli Medical College Psychiatry Department (600 Kms. South of Madras) where the psychiatrist requested a second opinion from a senior colleague at Madras. He was investigated for an organic disorder of the brain. E.E.G. was normal. There was no previous history of seizure disorder. A diagnosis of malingering was made at the trial. The psychiatry expert testimony was accepted and the assailants was sentenced to a short period of imprisonment.

DISCUSSION

It would be worthwhile to compare notes of the various assailants or would be assassins of V.I.P.'s in other times and other parts of the world. Hadfield, the assailant of George III in 1800, Oxford, the assailant of Queen Victoria in 1840 and MacNaughton, the assassins of Drummond in 1843 were found to be insane at the time of commission of the crimes and were detained in asylums. All the seven assailants of Queen Victoria were mentally impaired.

The assassins of the four American Presidents were also mentally unstable. The case history of individuals who wrote threatening letters to the U.S. Presidents and detailed at the Medical Centre for Federal Prisoners in Springfield, are reviewed (Rothstein, 1965). There were eleven individuals. All of them are schizophrenics. Oswald, the murdered assassin of President Kennedy received a diagnosis of "schizoid personality and schizophrenic tendencies".

In our case material it is remarkable to note the similarities of the assailant of Rajaji to MacNaughton. The evolution of the symptoms leading to the gross deterioration of thought and behaviour is striking. The author has described the various crimes of persons with schizophrenia (Somasundaram, 1974). The importance of catatonic schizophrenia with reference to Indian psychotic crimes was alluded to by the author in his earlier papers (Somasundaram, 1960 and 1974).

One of our cases is associated with malingering. It should not be difficult to distinguish between genuine and feigned amnesia (Somasundaram and Ramadoss, 1976). Similarly the amnesia of the epileptics could be differentiated (Somasundaram, 1972).
In a democratic set-up and in its Courts of Justice, all the victims and accused are equal. It is not unnatural or unusual that some of the criminal cases associated with V.I.P.'s raise controversies and discussions. The recent attack on President Reagan by John Hinckley is a pointer in this direction (Stone, 1984). The insanity plea come under fire and scrutiny by the various interested parties. The psychiatrists were severally criticised: 'The psychiatrists spun sticky webs of pseudo-scientific jargon and in these webs, the concepts of justice, like a moth, fluttered feebly and was trapped'. The insanity defence was critically analysed by the A.M.A., A.P.A. and A. Bar A. (Kaplon and Sadock, 1988). The American Psychiatric Association in its 1983 report suggested modification in the insanity defence (Insanity Defence Workgroup, 1983). Over forty bills were introduced in the Congress to amend the law but none was passed. It looks as if that the status quo in the insanity pleas should be maintained for the present.

The Tamil Nadu case reveal the usual difficulties in interpreting the law with reference to mentally abnormal offenders. Serious controversies as in the West do not occur and law and psychiatry continue to co-exist with mutual trust and understanding.

APPENDIX

Extracts from the letters of S.R. written to Prof. A. Venkoba Rao in late 1991.

Brain is the Machine that could develop mind to have aerial contact. The life line of Ramayana - without morality Dharma would be a mirage. Without Dharma, where is the God? Now/a/days mere marriage has become a licence for immorality - some wives expect too much from their husbands - many husbands indulge in their relation. Divine revelation - Warning about Pitfalls: Divine revelation can’t be distinguished from the criminalism explained above.

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