



PAUL HARRISON AWARD 2004

Dr. Binayak Sen joined the MBBS course at Christian Medical College, Vellore in 1966. Throughout his years at C.M.C., he was a brilliant student, constantly pushing the bar in his search for truth and relevance. He passed out from the college as one of its top students. He was then selected for the M.D. course in Paediatrics, and once again came out with flying colours.

After leaving Vellore, Dr. Binayak Sen joined the faculty of the Centre for Social Medicine at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, where he focused his attention on social analysis of health policy. Subsequently, he joined a rural health programme in Madhya Pradesh, focusing on the problem of tuberculosis. During this period, he was also involved in evaluating several well-known community health projects, in association with the Medico-Friends Circle. It soon became clear to him that organized movement towards attainment of human rights was an integral part of achieving an acceptable level of health in the community.

At this stage, there was a whole world of options before him. Yet he and his wife, Illina, who is a teacher, chose to go to rural Chattisgarh, to work with mine workers' unions, under the leadership of one of India's finest trade union leaders, Shankar Guha Niyogi. The mineworkers' movement had reached a crucial point. They had fought for and got higher wages, but this had to translate into a better quality of life. Health and education were crucial for this. Binayak and Illina Sen threw themselves into this venture. The Shaheed Hospital was born, with this brilliant son of Vellore as the doctor, earning just Rs. 600 a month. He later extended his services to tribal villagers who had been displaced by the creation of a dam in the upper Mahanadi basin.

After several years, Dr. Sen moved to the Tilda Mission Hospital and other needy areas in the Chattisgarh region. He, however, continues to be a guiding spirit for the mineworkers' movement. Today, he and his wife run Rupantara, a voluntary organization in Raipur that works for health, education and human rights. Dr. Sen is an active crusader for human rights, investigating custodial deaths and other such infringements in the region. This is a thankless and dangerous job but he does it undaunted. He has also set up the Chattisgarh unit of the People's Union for Civil Liberties, a human rights organization, and is currently its General Secretary.

Throughout these efforts, the stress of Dr. Sen's work has been on decentralization and demystification of health technology and the active involvement of the community. Since 2000, he has been associated with the Jan Swasthya Abhiyan, a countrywide coalition for the right to health care, where he represents the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM), on its National Council. He took part in the People's Health Assembly in Dhaka in this capacity. He has also been part of the State Health Advisory Committee that has designed and put in place a statewide programme for the selection, training and deployment of community health workers.

Dr. Binayak Sen has been true to the spirit and vision of his alma mater and has carried his dedication to truth and service to the very frontline of the battle. He has broken the mould, re-defined the possible role of the doctor in a broken and unjust society, holding the cause much more precious than personal safety. CMC is proud to be associated with Binayak and Illina Sen. He is a role model for the students and staff of CMC, someone who stands out for his literal pursuit of the founding values of CMC.

In recognition of his outstanding contribution to society, the Christian Medical College is proud to bestow the Paul Harrison award upon its illustrious son, Dr. Binayak Sen.

DIRECTOR.
Vellore, 25.10.2004

PRINCIPAL.