

The fourth meeting of the Leicester Medical Society was held on Tuesday 15th January in the George Davies Centre, Lancaster Road. Dr Julian Simpson MA PhD (Researcher, University of Manchester) gave a talk entitled 'Migrant doctors, architects of the NHS' and was supported by twenty three members.

His research was conducted by means of taking the oral histories of forty-five South Asian doctors who entered Great Britain between 1940 and 1980 eventually settling as general practitioners. He examined the stories of each of the doctors, their hopes, aspirations and attitudes and the challenges they met on their journey into general practice.

These doctors have made a significant contribution to the work of general practice mainly within city centres. General practice is an essential part the organisation of the National Health Service so the contribution these doctors have made is central to British Society.

Doctors who train abroad are needed in their countries of origin. Dr Simpson wanted his work to show that immigration was a process, to avoid emotive overtones and help us to seek to understand and value this process.

He explained that the immigration of South Asian doctors into Great Britain was part of our Imperial Legacy. A slide was shown of a doctor's plaque: 'DR HL GULATI' who opened his doctor's practice in 1920: Asian doctors were migrating to this country many years before the introduction of the National Health Service. They were sometimes joined by other South Asian doctors.

During the time of the British Empire, Medical Schools were opened in South Asia under the jurisdiction of the British Royal Colleges. South Asian doctors aspired to train in the UK and achieve membership of British Royal Colleges: they wanted British degrees. They 'remained in the post imperial state'. Primarily, they came to work in hospitals and often found themselves in the most undesirable specialties and locations: the oral histories of the forty-five doctors gave support to how they were discriminated against with many sending off multiple applications for jobs without success. One doctor reported sending off seventy two applications. They found that British graduates were preferred because 'their behaviour was understood'. The Asian doctors did not belong to the same social network.

This led to Asian doctors seeking work as general practitioners in the UK: one female doctor discovered that the reason she was not selected for the jobs she applied for was because she was 'of child-bearing age'. She decided to open her own practice in an inner city.

Many of her male colleagues did likewise. They discovered that their work was appreciated by their patients who were mainly working-class. They found that they were liked and

accepted within their towns and cities with many invited to become Rotarians and Freemasons.

The proportion of South Asian general practitioners grew to a third of the GP workforce: British general practice would have become unviable without the contribution they made.

The Asian doctors were more likely to have strong religious beliefs. They brought up their children with the same attitudes and aspirations as themselves: there are now as many doctors with the surname 'Patel' as 'Smith'.

There have been more complaints and investigations by the GMC against immigrant doctors: one reason for this is thought to be that these doctors did not have the same support as their British counterparts.

The meeting was closed with a vote of thanks by Dr Ursula Montgomery.