

Sri. MATHEW KOKAD

FOUNDER of
M/s KOKAD PHARMACEUTICAL
LABORATORIES LTD



Sri. Mathew Kokad is a successful Pharmacy Graduate from the College of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Medical College, Thiruvananthapuram, founded M/s Kokad Pharmaceutical Laboratories Ltd in 1985 at Pala, Kottayam. He selected the career of a Manufacturing Chemist in the highly challenging I.V Fluid Drugs manufacturing sector.

During 1992 – 2004, his firm was the market leader in the L.V.P and S.V.P Manufacturing sector, leading the O.R.G ratings. Due to a sudden set back in the manufacturing sector in Kerala, many Pharmaceutical firms were forced to close down and M/s KPL also found it difficult to bypass the critical situation. Sri. Mathew Kokad is sharing his Professional life from a Student to the present status and is giving his valuable guidance for the budding professionals in the Pharmaceutical field.

Pharma First team is proud to present the visions and practical suggestions of Sri. Mathew Kokad for establishing new Pharmaceutical Industries in Kerala.

Q-1. Sir, you are now in the 40th year of your career in the Pharmaceutical industry in Kerala, after graduation from College of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Thiruvananthapuram. How do you rate your career in the Field?

After completing B Pharm from CPS, I started working in the Pharmaceutical industry and established my own firm in a speciality sector and worked hard. I hope I have done my best to have an important role in my professional life.

Q-2. What were your ambitions and expectations when you joined the Pharmacy Education when most of your family members were in the Medical field?

As usual, I tried to get into the medical field, but landed in the allied field of Pharmacy. While choosing the Pharmacy profession, I dreamt of the Pharmaceutical industry.

Q-3 Kindly narrate your student life in College of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Thiruvananthapuram in the late 70's, especially during the budding stage of Pharmacy Education in Kerala?

Joined CPS in 1974. Since there was no college for Pharmacy Education, B.Pharm course was conducted at University College, Govt. Engineering College, and Medical College. The dream of an independent college of Pharmacy was materialized during the 1975-76 period only. Still, facilities, faculties and other amenities were inadequate and the students had to struggle a lot to urge the Government to provide the same. At that time, the students association was very strong and the entire students acted as a block to get their needs fulfilled. Subsequent to the agitations, 7 of our students were jailed for 7 days. Thus managed to gain more facilities, more faculty, and status of the "College of Pharmaceutical Sciences" from the earlier status of 'Department of Pharmacy'.

Q-4 We are very anxious to know about the selection of Pharmaceutical Industry as your career, especially in Kerala, when most of your Colleagues opted for jobs abroad for a hassle-free life without any stress?

I dreamt to go ahead with a more challenging and meaningful career. It was a planned and calculated decision since the choosing of my profession. I was aware that it would not be a bunch of roses and have to strive, it will be very strenuous, especially in Kerala.

After graduation, my choice was to gain a Government job - especially with my physical disabilities. Still, I opted to stand independently, and be my own boss. It would have been much easier for me to float in the stream as every pharmacy professional has done in Kerala, except my veteran seniors Dr.Majeed, Mr.Shan, Mr.Joy etc.

Q-5 Please share your development as a manufacturing chemist in the IV Fluid manufacturing sector and the challenges you faced to maintain in that field in the midst of stringent conditions of manufacturing?

After completion of B.Pharm in 1979, joined with KSDP as a trainee chemist, got primary exposure in production, Q C, purchase, administration with special emphasis to IV Fluids and other Sterile Products. Worked in industries in the manufacture, QC, marketing. During 1982, designed, installed and commissioned a new IV fluid industry as a professional consultant. During 1985, started own family concern '**Kokad Pharmaceutical Laboratories (P) Ltd**', which commenced commercial production during April 1986. Later, during 1996, the company was converted into Public Limited aiming at public issue and initiated major expansion with SVP, B Lactam, Cephalosporin, Eye/ Ear drops, sterile surgicals, etc. But the public issue didn't materialize due to crash down of Share market due to 'Metha Scam'. Still completed the project by 1998 complying with revised Schedule M and WHO GMP Certification.

Q-6. In your opinion, what are the major hurdles in establishing a Drugs manufacturing unit in Kerala?

In fact, the soil and climate were less fertile

especially for the Pharmaceutical industry during the course of my initiation and development. The basic outlook of People and bureaucrats were not in favour of the industry- however, they need jobs, revenue, commodities and all amenities. This basic character builds complex hurdles. All offices connected with the industry were more inclined to dishearten the promoter. The only exemption was the Drug Control Authorities who promoted me to the best of their ability within the frame works of the regulation and they were well accessible to me. The labour laws and its executors were not at all investor friendly. The trade unions were also in the forefront to create hurdles.

Q-7. What are the factors lead to the establishment of a highly challenging LVP and SVP Manufacturing unit at Pala, away from an Industrial area where there are lot of facilities to start a unit with basic infrastructure?

The I.V Fluid and Sterile Drug products are the toughest. I preferred to opt it, since very rare people will dare to head on. Since Pala was my native place, I expected better ground support from my people and wanted to create employment opportunities and wealth to my native. All infrastructures and abundant water, power, educated labour, connectivity etc. were available, even though bit interior. The locality was serene, unpolluted, and suitable to install such a delicate industry.

Q-8. Can you narrate the deviations in demand observed in the LVP and SVP sector during the past 34 years after starting Kokad Pharmaceuticals? Which period was the best time, if there is such a time exists?

Till the early 1990s, the I.V. Fluids were in glass containers. Subsequently, the glass containers were gradually replaced by plastic bottles and later by more delicate FFS technology. The demand was growing not less than 5% annually for LVP and SVP and we could utilize the full capacity by 1990. We enhanced the capacity of LVP, introduced I.V.Fluids in Plastic Bottles, and introduced other SVP s by 1996. The golden period of the industry was from 1992 to 2004. As per ORG surveys also we were leading during many of the years. Products were well accepted with high ranking in quality, service and consistency. We could also build better confidence and trust among our clients, and the health care sector- both public and private. During that period, we were having a good

team of professionals in Manufacturing- QC-QA, marketing and administration. We were one of the leading suppliers for injectable medicines for Kerala and Karnataka governments from 1992 to 2007.

Q-9 What are the external factors prevented you from modernizing the unit when there was implementation of GMP specifications in Drug manufacturing?

We were one of the major suppliers of life saving medicines to the State Government from 1992. Blockage of huge funds for prolonged period against Government supplies caused operational loss. Constrained and competitive rates, unhealthy competition from giant Indian and multinational companies, higher cost of production, low production capacity etc. added this. By the implementation of the Drugs Price Control Order, irrational rates fixed for I.V. Fluids were also an inhibiting factor. By 2012, almost all I.V. Fluid manufacturing units in South India had to close down. Trade unionism and difficulty to raise capital were other constraints. A capital investment of about Rs.40-50 Cr was required for modernization of I.V. Fluid plant with a viable capacity and modern FFS and matching machinery complying with C-GMP. This was astronomical figure and the ROI projections were unviable especially in the light of dwindling Government policies and strange costing parameters of DPCO.

Q-10 Which career do you enjoy the most, as a manufacturing chemist, as a Pharmacy manufacturer, as a planter, as a formulation developer or as marketing personnel, considering the risk factors?

I enjoyed the career of an industrialist and a chemist- Both involved a high degree of challenge and risk - especially in Kerala.

Q-11 What are your passions and hobbies, other than a Pharmacy Technician and Businessman?

I love Music- especially Karnatic Music and play the Violin.

Q-12. How will you evaluate yourself considering the professional life & family life?

I attempted to contribute to the best of my ability for my profession, my society and nation. You

may ask at the end of the day what you have gained. I evaluate myself not with my bank balance as on a date or the awards I received. During my professional career from 1974 when I joined Trivandrum Medical College as a B.Pharm Student, I was active as a student leader, as an aggressive professional, fought for the betterment of the profession, lead two major agitations against the neglect of the Government to the Pharmacy profession, went behind bars for professional causes. Started own industry, providing employment to hundreds of unemployed youths, trained hundreds of pharmacy professionals, who are now placed worldwide.

I am from a middle-class family from Central Travancore, my ancestors were farmers and I am a first generation industrialist - may be only one among my family and one among few who graduated from CPS for the last 50 years. Lost control of my Company during 2005, entered back in 2007, struggled to revive and hold on from collapse till 2012. The industry closed and went under RR during 2012. Recovered during 2018 and now under control of our family once again and on for taking off at the appropriate time.

On self-evaluation, even in spite of severe hardships for the last 40 years, I don't repent on starting an industry in Kerala. That was a period of struggle not only for me- may be for many others. Kindly recollect your memories of the Malayalam Movie '**Varavelppu**' with starring **Mohanlal** and **Revathi**. But now I feel the scenario has changed and rays of hope are there on the horizon.

About my family-Wife Rosamma, an Arts graduate is full-time Director of the Company. Son, Thomas, B.Pharm, -Bachelor- Businessman in the field of Pharma and Nutraceutical, now a major shareholder of Kokad Pharma Ltd., maybe resembling the character done by **Nivin Pauli** in the film '**Jacobinte Swarga rajyam**'. Younger daughter- Ammu married PG student at Amrita School of Medicine Ernakulam. Happily living with my mother aged 95. All of the above stood firmly in my good and bad days.

Q-13. Please share an event which you cannot forget in your life – the good & the bad and its impact?

Good and bad: Both related to Jail life. During 1977 towards the end of a month-long agitation by

KBSA (Kerala B.Pharm Students Association), for professional matters, we were arrested from the campus and sent to Attakkulangara sub-jail. From 13th to 19th April 77, we, a 7 numbered student agitators including Dr. C.S.Satheesh Kumar -Retd. DC, Sri.V.N.Raveendran- Retd. ADC, Mr.K.Bhasi-Retd. DDC, Sri. Johnny Joseph Parackal Retd..RDI, and 2 others and I spent there. The professional causes, the hardships and endeavors we underwent and the unity and solidarity of the entire Students community is still glowing in the mind as sweet evergreen memories. The pricking memory is also related to another jail entry related to a labor matter.

Q-14. Most of your family members are either in the Medical field or in the Pharmacy field including your Son & daughter. What are the advantages you had while establishing the firm at your native place in the Family name?

Our family is mainly connected with the medical profession and the family name helped a lot initially. After establishing the name of the Company added more lustre to the family name. So it was of mutual benefit to family as well as industry and double fold personally for me. By starting the firm in my native place, I was more confident, got good ground support, good labor and good HR.

Q-15. You are an active member of Professional Pharmacists Associations in the State and in the Country. How will you compare the growth of the profession among other professions during the past three decades?

I am desperate and dejected by the status of my profession in India-, especially in Kerala. It is still considered as it was 50 years back- as a compounder or a salesman or a person equal or just above an attendant. In other countries, the Pharmacy profession is highly respectable and having high social status and well paid. In the US, it is one among the first 5 professions in status as well as remunerations. We never tried to improve the social status to highlight the profession in society. It is a pity that after through the toughest B.Pharm course with 4 years, 6 years M.Pharm and 6-year Doctoral studies, the young generation is destined to wrap the tablet as per the prescription with a closed intellect, deeply buried knowledge, and tarnished self-esteem. In order to practice as a

pharmacist, they should be taught their authorities, duties and rights and teach them to practice the same boldly without pride or prejudice for the well-being of the society. It is only because of the irresponsibility of the profession the overmedication, wrong medication; deal prescription, antibiotic resistance etc. eating away the public health. I suspect that more death is now happening due to irrational use of medicines and Iatrogenicity than by diseases. The 95% of professionals are desperately underpaid even below an illiterate kitchen maid, baby sitter or a farm laborer. It is funny that they are happy with it.

Q-16 There is an increase of Pharmacy Graduates and Post Graduates in the State during the past 15 years with different specializations. Unemployment also is on the increase. What are your suggestions to select the best career in Pharmacy now in India and in our State?

B.Pharm course started in Kerala in 1966-67 with 25 seats. Now the number of colleges is about 45 with a large number of PG and Pharm.D. and the number of graduates alone passing out is about 2,500 per year. Instead of growth, about 85% of Pharmaceutical industries in Kerala were closed down during the last 25 years. Domestic production v/s consumption ratio is 1:100. ie only 1% of the medicines consumed is produced in the state. In the industrial field, we cannot expect any miracle in the immediate future. So is with fate with a Government job. Practically, only way out is in the practicing pharmacy field. In the health care sector and society, we have to snatch the rights and authorities deprived of us and have to build our own slots. This will be possible only by unity and concerted efforts of the entire Pharmacy profession as we have done during the dawning ages of the Pharmacy profession in Kerala. Otherwise, with 20 numbers of crippling industries, 5 or 10 Drugs Inspector posts or Analyst post or a hundred Pharmacist post (eligibility from Diploma holders to Pharm D holders), the destiny of thousands of Pharmacy Graduates, PG's, Pharmacy Doctors will be in roll drums.

Q-17. There is an increase in the Pharmacy professionals and Medical stores in the State. But the manufacturing sector is going down when there is ample scope for drugs sales in the State. What are your suggestions for uplifting the Pharmacy Manufacturing when there is enough expertise, requirements,



availability of raw materials, funding scope from NRIs and tax uniformity?

Not only with pharmacy, all-together, but we also enjoy to be a consumer population. This soil is not fertile for Industries. Here, we have to exert multi fold strain and energy to establish and operate an industry comparing other parts of the Country or the World. I am one of the rare professionals having first-hand exposure for the last 40 years. On being an entrepreneur, I enjoyed sweet and sour, happiness and tears. Even in spite of all above, I say, don't write off Kerala for industrialization in the Pharmacy sector. I don't expect the industries will market entire products in Kerala. We may get a share. But I view the Globe as the market and with our educated, intelligent manpower and skill; and even in spite of whatever bitterness narrated previously, we can convert Kerala as a Global Hub of Pharmacy industry. Kerala is one of the ideal location blessed with excellent global connectivity both Marine and Arial- need not say other positive aspects. See the recent attempts made by Telangana coming forth with 10,000 Acres of a single dedicated Pharmacy Industrial zone, Tamil Nadu Government galloping to be biggest Pharmacy industrial hub in India, Karnataka industrial ministry with attractive scopes. Kerala should also identify the golden opportunities in this sector and come forward.

But the pressure should come from our profession- it is our bread. More than that the need of our profession- to have placements for our younger professionals and to train them to make a Brain Bank to serve the Global Pharmaceutical Industry.

Q-18.What are your upcoming projects and your future vision regarding the scope of LVP/SVP manufacturing in the State?

Sterile manufacturing is the most complex, intricate and also challenging area. It is highly capital intensive. Now, it is meaningless to start small and low tech facility when the competitors have most modern-high tech-high output plants. Even though sterile manufacturing and projects were my specialties, I am not daring to jump into this arena immediately, since it requires huge investment and not interested to shoulder huge loans. Of course, South India lacks a good LVP plant since the requirements of southern states are catered by Industries in the north and the cost of transportation itself will come up to about 20 % of the wholesale price. A new LVP/SVP plant is again in my dreams- but only at the appropriate time, and when my next generation gets confident. Till that time the existing facilities may be converted to less investment-intensive Non Parenteral, Food and Nutraceuticals.