

Obituary

S. Padmavati

(20 June 1917–29 August 2020)



GODDESS OF CARDIOLOGY

'As I knew this Legend'

Professor Sivaramakrishna Iyer Padmavati also known as the Goddess of Cardiology in India contributed immensely to the science of this discipline of Medicine. Born in Rangoon (Yangon of today) in a family of barristers on 20 June 1917, she had three brothers and two sisters. Her brothers were barristers. One of her sisters was the well-known neurologist in Delhi, Professor S. Janaki. Her early education was in Burma (Myanmar of today) and culminated in receiving the MBBS degree from Rangoon University. Interestingly, another doyen of cardiology, Professor Sujoy Bijoy Roy, was also born there and received his MBBS degree from the same university.

She then went to England where she studied medicine and received her Fellowship from the Royal College of Physicians (FRCP) of London and Edinburgh. During her stay in the UK, she worked at the National Heart Hospital, National Chest Hospital, and the National Hospital, Queen Square, London. After finishing her FRCP, she had a brief stint in Sweden, in the Southern Hospital and applied for Fellowships in Cardiology in the Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. She got the Fellowship and studied with Helen Taussig (another celebrity in later years). She then joined Harvard Medical School under Paul Dudley White, a pioneer of modern cardiology, in 1952.

She returned to India in 1953 and started her career at the Lady Hardinge Medical College as a lecturer. In 1954, she was one of the very few female cardiologists along with Dr Kamala Vytilingam from Vellore, Tamil Nadu. She set up a cardiac catheterization laboratory at the Lady Hardinge Medical College, much against the wishes of senior doctors there. They considered it to be a male domain, which she always contested. In association with the Medical Council of India, she initiated one of the first post-doctoral degrees in cardiology, DM Cardiology. After that she, to spread the message and work in preventive cardiology group, started the All-India Heart Foundation in collaboration with the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, an organization approved by the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India. She was Secretary General of the 5th World Congress of Cardiology held in Delhi in 1966. In 1968, she joined the Maulana Azad Medical College and established the department of

cardiology at the Govind Ballabh (GB) Pant Hospital, an affiliated hospital of the Maulana Azad Medical College. The hospital is credited with having one of the first dedicated coronary care units of the country.

I had the good fortune of watching Professor Padmavati from close quarters during my formative years beginning 1972. I did my internship followed by residency in Medicine and finally got my postdoctoral degree in Cardiology from the Maulana Azad Medical College and GB Pant Hospital in 1978. She was a stickler for time, a disciplinarian and very humane in nature. She ran an outpatient clinic and used to take grand rounds of all the cardiology wards of the hospital regularly. In addition, she used to run a rheumatic fever prophylaxis programme through the school health services in Delhi. She literally forced me to join cardiology training in 1975 after I passed my MD in Medicine. Those were the days when getting a job in super-specialties was difficult and hence these were not sought after. I was however proven wrong and I, under her mentorship, became a cardiologist, a decision I do not regret. She was a very fine lady, fond of swimming, reading and writing. Her evenings had a fixed programme every day—a glass of port wine and listening to BBC World news from 8.00 to 8.30 p.m. Nothing would move her from this ritual. She was always up-to-date with the latest in cardiology.

After retirement, she started the National Heart Institute in Delhi, which became an excellent tertiary care unit of the city. It also became the office of the All-India Heart Foundation where she conducted several research projects. Till she breathed her last, she was associated with it and used to visit it every day for a fixed time. She had full faith in the doctors of the hospital. She got herself treated and a bypass surgery done in the same hospital. Besides her association with this hospital, she used to see patients in her private clinic at her residence in Delhi. For all her achievements, she was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1967 and the Padma Vibhushan in 1992. Delhi University made her an Emeritus Professor, a rare feat for a medical doctor.

She lived a full life of 103 years and she used to say that the reasons for her good health and longevity were her strong genes and a disciplined life. Unfortunately, Covid-19 took away this brilliant and charming lady from us. She caught the infection and did not make it despite aggressive treatment at her own hospital. We will always remember her as a role model for the cardiology fraternity of India.

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