

Obituaries

Badri Nath Tandon

(1 August 1931–5 March 2018)



On 5 March 2018, Professor Badri Nath Tandon, a towering personality in the field of clinical gastroenterology left for his heavenly abode, marking the end of an era for most gastroenterologists of India. He is credited with establishing gastroenterology on a scientific pedestal in India with a lifetime of dedicated original research work. He also trained some of the greatest experts and teachers in the field today. His life can be

considered a benchmark for personal integrity, hard work, passion for teaching, medical research and clinical work.

Born on 1 August 1931, Professor B.N. Tandon completed his medical graduation and postgraduation from King George's Medical College, Lucknow. He joined the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi in 1962 as a faculty member in the Department of Medicine and made it his *karmabhumi*. From here, he travelled abroad for further experience in Gastroenterology and Human Nutrition at Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts Institute of Technology at Boston, USA. During his stay there, he imbibed the local work culture and implemented it in the new division of gastroenterology, which he created at AIIMS for post-doctoral training leading to the degree of DM (Gastroenterology). The division was later formalized as a full-fledged department in 1973. The department has since then achieved international fame for producing innovative and pioneering research work and has maintained *numero uno* position in India for trend-setting research work in gastroenterology. It was his vision to have an integrated discipline of medical and surgical gastroenterology and for that he joined hands with the brilliant surgical mind, Professor Samiran Nundy. The combined rounds of AB2 ward at AIIMS have inspired many to do the same with a view to provide wholesome education to all participants.

As a national leader in the field of gastroenterology, he worked relentlessly to develop innovative and practical approaches for the diagnosis and treatment of diseases prevalent in India. He carried out several distinctive investigative projects covering the impact of malnutrition on intestine, pancreas and liver and the role of pathogens and food toxins in various diseases. His legendary epidemiological investigations on veno-occlusive disease of the liver led to the discovery that pyrrolizidine alkaloids present in *jhunjhunia* seeds is the cause of this dreadful malady. His work on liver failure challenged western dogmas as he described the syndrome of subacute hepatic failure prevalent in South Asia. He relentlessly worked towards the isolation of hepatitis E virus and the introduction of a new therapeutic protocol for hepatitis E and C using herbal plant extracts.

He published over 225 original scientific medical papers, four monographs, 13 chapters in various internationally acclaimed textbooks and two original textbooks on gastroenterology relevant to the tropics. He was an editorial adviser to several national and international journals such as the *National Medical Journal of India*, *Ceylon Medical Journal*, *Asian Pacific Journal of Gastroenterology and Hepatology*, *Hepatology Communication*,

European Journal of Hepatology, *Journal of Clinical Gastroenterology* and *Gastroenterology International*. As the chairman of Digestive Disease Foundation of India, he started a journal *Tropical Gastroenterology*, which was recognized internationally and indexed in the *Index Medicus* as it dealt with diseases in tropical and developing countries. He had been president of the Indian Society of Gastroenterology as well as such societies as the International Association of Liver Diseases, Asian Pacific Association for the Study of Liver and Nutrition Society of India (1995–99) and vice-president of the World Gastroenterology Organization.

Apart from being a brilliant academician, his awareness about societal needs and zeal to contribute to it was unmatched. He was founder of a unique mission launched on a massive scale on 2 October 1975 under the banner of the Integrated Child Development Services Scheme. His passionate commitment to this cause led to its evolution as a flagship programme of the Government of India and as the foremost symbol of the country's commitment to its children and nursing mothers, aiming to provide preschool non-formal education on the one hand and breaking the vicious cycle of malnutrition, morbidity, reduced learning capacity and mortality on the other hand. The beneficiaries under the scheme were children in the age group of 0–6 years, pregnant women and lactating mothers. The Government of India recognized his assiduity by awarding him the Padma Bhushan.

Fellowship of several prestigious academies was bestowed on him in recognition of his work. Examples are the National Academy of Medical Sciences, Indian National Science Academy, Indian Academy of Pediatrics, Indian Association of Preventive and Social Medicine and Indian Public Health Association. Internationally, his contribution was recognized as he was awarded the Sasakawa World Health Organization Health Prize by the WHO and the Jubilee Medal of the Russian Academy of Medical Sciences in 1995. He also delivered several orations such as the Dr R.V. Rajam Oration (1983–84) of the National Academy of Medical Sciences and was honoured with the Lifetime Achievement Award of the New Delhi chapter of the Indian Medical Association (2004) and the inaugural Lifetime Achievement Award of Indian Society of Gastroenterology (2007).

He superannuated from AIIMS in 1991. In the years, after his superannuation, he continued to promote meaningful medical education under the aegis of the Digestive Diseases Foundation for gastroenterologists, physicians and general practitioners of north India. He also continued to provide clinical service to patients at Pushpawati Singhanian Research Institute in New Delhi, where he had joined as its director and senior consultant and later at Metro Group of Hospitals, Noida, where he was chairman till his last days. Not many people are aware of his spiritual dimension and that he also ran a charitable outpatient department in Mathura till the very end.

I was one of his students during his last five years at AIIMS. His pursuit of excellence in gastroenterology left a deep impact on me and all my colleagues. We saw his meticulous planning before he attended a scientific conference so that he would not miss any important event there. We were deeply impressed by his inimitable self-discipline. The fact that he expected the same discipline from all people around him was the subject of endless discussion among us in the department. Soon after obtaining my DM, I had

written a paper, 'Why are Indian professors autocratic?' and submitted it to his journal. I was told by many of my colleagues in the department to be ready for repercussions for raising my voice against his iron hand. However, the paper was published without any editor's cuts. Subsequently, I was posted with the Army at an area where I could not reach current literature. After I told him this, he began to send me all his personal scientific journals by post (it was much before the internet era). Every time during the past 30-odd years after my DM, when I met him, either in the department or at a conference, he had a one-line advice for me. He was the one who taught me that between reading a new idea/research (*adhyayan*) and its application in your practice (*vyavahar*) is a very important and mandatory step of contemplation (*manan*

aur chintan). 'Think whether the evidence is robust and whether it would benefit your patients?' Another one that has helped me a lot in keeping up-to-date was, 'Don't say no when you are asked to speak on any subject. And even if you have spoken on that subject about a month back; prepare a fresh talk, because our perspective as well as the current knowledge is constantly changing.'

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Many doctors in India practise medicine in difficult areas under trying circumstances and resist the attraction of better prospects in western countries and elsewhere. They die without their contributions to our country being acknowledged.

The National Medical Journal of India wishes to recognize the efforts of these doctors. We invite short accounts of the life and work of a recently deceased colleague by a friend, student or relative. The account in about 500 to 1000 words should describe his or her education and training and highlight the achievements as well as disappointments. A photograph should accompany the obituary.

—Editor