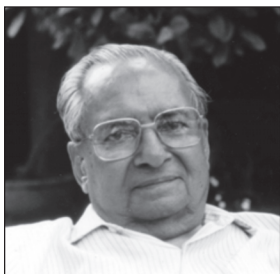


## Obituary

### Prem Chandra Dhanda (28 May 1911–28 February 2013)



Dr Prem Chandra Dhanda (PCD) was born in Ambala (then Eastern Punjab, now Haryana), then known for its educational facilities, commerce and a large military cantonment. His father, Dunichand Ambalvi, was an eminent lawyer and leader of the Indian National Congress in Punjab, leading the non-violent struggle against British rule. PCD's mother

Bhagdevi raised a large family, and was an active participant in the freedom struggle—she faced various hardships of the movement, including being jailed along with her husband.

PCD was admitted to the Anglo Sanskrit High School (DAV), where he had a brilliant academic record, culminating in the first position in matriculation in Punjab—he also created a new record in this examination. His schooling (1916–26) coincided with a stormy period for the family and for Punjab as a whole. His parents were jailed and the province faced the worst kind of oppression with martial law and the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919. It is remarkable that PCD did so well during this very difficult period.

After passing his matriculation, PCD joined FSc (Medical Group) in Government College, Lahore, an institution with an aristocratic and cosmopolitan atmosphere, in which top scholastic achievers and outstanding sportsmen were given preferential admission. At college, PCD was among the top in the merit list and easily got admission to King Edward Medical College (KEMC), Lahore. In KEMC, he maintained his excellence in studies and was awarded gold medals for first positions in medicine and gynaecology and obstetrics at the MBBS examination in 1934.

After graduation, PCD did a senior house job in Medicine at Mayo Hospital, attached to KEMC, for 1 year. He then went to London and worked in Hammersmith Hospital for 2 years. He passed the MRCP (London) examination in the first attempt. PCD then joined the Indian Army Medical Corps (IAMC) in 1938. After preliminary training in India, he was posted to centres in the Middle East and North Africa as a medical specialist, reaching the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

While PCD was studying in KEMC, he met Leila Dharmavir. Her father, Dr N.R. Dharmavir, was a staunch nationalist who returned to India leaving his practice in England to be involved in India's freedom struggle. Leila and PCD had a simple court marriage on 2 October 1939 (Gandhiji's birthday).

PCD left the army in 1945 and started private practice. In 1945, he also joined the Irwin Hospital (later renamed Lok Nayak Hospital) in New Delhi as an Honorary Physician. In the following years he built a reputation as an excellent cardiologist renowned for his diagnostic abilities. He was physician to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Dr Rajendra Prasad, the first president of independent India, and a number of later Presidents. Over the years he became consultant physician to several eminent leaders including Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Govind Ballabh Pant, Zakir Hussain and others. At Irwin Hospital he taught many young doctors who later achieved eminence.

The Government of India had decided to have an institution of advanced medical care and training in New Delhi. A special Act was passed by Parliament for this autonomous institute—the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS). According to an initial decision, AIIMS was to be associated with Irwin Hospital. Later on, due to a disagreement between the Delhi State and Central governments, it was shifted to Ansari Nagar with its own facilities, thus denying teaching hospital status to Irwin Hospital.

At this stage, PCD, along with other senior colleagues, played a crucial role in reviving the fortunes of Irwin Hospital, against enormous resistance. He convinced the Medical Council of India (MCI) and the Government of India to agree to another medical college in Delhi—this became Maulana Azad Medical College (MAMC), attached to Irwin Hospital.

The honorary clinical staff of Irwin Hospital were made honorary faculty of this college. In line with the requirements of the MCI, full-time staff were recruited with Colonel B.L. Taneja as Director-Principal in charge of both the college and hospital (1958–63). After the retirement of Colonel Taneja, General B.N. Bhandari took over (1963–65). When Dr Bhandari retired in 1965, staff of the institution unanimously agreed to request the Ministry of Health to appoint Dr Dhanda as the next Director-Principal. He agreed, but requested to be allowed private practice outside official working hours, since, as Honorary faculty, he was not eligible for retirement benefits. He took only a token salary of ₹1 per month for a full 8 hours a day of work in the institution. He took over as Director-Principal of MAMC and associated hospitals. This arrangement worked for two years. He was able to clear many pending and long-term administrative issues.

Dr Dhanda was convinced that for the country to advance, facilities must be developed for specialized medicine and medical research. He put in all his efforts to creating specialty departments of psychiatry, cardiology, cardiac surgery, gastroenterology, surgical gastroenterology, neurology and neurosurgery. In this way PCD set up Govind Ballabh Pant hospital on its path as a superspecialty hospital and did his utmost to get the best professionals to run these newly created specialty departments.

PCD's term of contract ended in 1967. MAMC and the specialty departments of G.B. Pant Hospital owe their existence to PCD. He returned to his private practice and his specialty, cardiology. Dr Dhanda was a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians (London). He was elected Fellow, National Academy of Medical Sciences. In recognition of his services to the Indian State, he was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1962.

On 6 November 1996, Dr Leila Dhanda had a sudden heart attack and passed away. It was a great loss to PCD and the family. He gradually reduced his clinical work. In 2005, at the age of 96 years he finally stopped his practice. His family was fortunate to witness his remarkable intellect and personality even in his later years. He lived up to 102 years and is survived by two daughters, four grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. He had been a giant of a man both physically and intellectually.

H.K. CHUTTANI  
Former Director, G.B. Pant Hospital  
New Delhi  
chanderchuttani@hotmail.com