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Obituaries

Professor Jagdish Chandra (5 June 1927 - 7 January 2002)

Professor Jagdish Chandra
(Born 5 June 1927 - Died 7 January 2002)



One of the greatest pillars of Indian Forensic Medicine, Professor Jagdish Chandra passed away on 7 January 2002 at Fishkill, New York, USA. I have the proud privilege of having been his student both as an undergraduate as well as a postgraduate student in forensic medicine.

Professor Jagdish Chandra retired in 1987 as Professor of Forensic Medicine from the most prestigious Indian Medical School, the *All India Institute of Medical Sciences*, New Delhi (often abbreviated simply as AIIMS). He joined the faculty of AIIMS, way back in 1961 and became a professor in 1977. He was a distinguished academician and a lover of forensic medicine. Very few people know that he was a qualified radiologist too, holding a post graduate degree in Radiology.

Professor Jagdish Chandra was instrumental in starting a post-graduate course in forensic medicine at the AIIMS. In 1975, a young and energetic student T.D. Dogra joined M.D. in Forensic Medicine as his first student. That young and energetic student is now a full fledged professor at the AIIMS, and

is heading the department of forensic medicine. I have the proud privilege of being the student of both Professor Jagdish Chandra as well as Professor T.D. Dogra.

I joined the M.D. Course in Forensic Medicine in 1979, and it was during that time that I had the chance to interact with him at close quarters. He of course taught me, when I was an undergraduate student (way back in 1975-76), but at that time we merely listened to him, and never had any chance to interact with him closely. I distinctly remember that when I got an admission offer from AIIMS (on July 25, 1979 - Wednesday), I was doing a housejob in Internal Medicine at the Safdarjang Hospital. Safdarjang Hospital and AIIMS are located opposite each other across a road. I must confess that my first reaction after receiving this admission call was to reject this offer, as at that time I wanted to specialize in otorhinolaryngology. I had even completed a successful six month housemanship in that specialty as a prerequisite to that (from January 1979 till June 1979). On July 26, 1979 (Thursday), I went to AIIMS, to give them my formal refusal letter so the next person in the list could be called.

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When I reached the AIIMS office, I asked the clerk some details about the examination. He told me that 35 students had appeared for the examination, out of which my position was 3rd in the waiting list. He advised me to meet Professor Jagdish Chandra, before declining the offer. As I had nothing to lose, I went upstairs. His office used to be on the first floor. He called me inside his room, and asked me to sit. For the first time I had the chance to see this majestic personality at such close quarters.

Although I had come with full determination to decline this offer, within 10 minutes he was able to convince me that forensic medicine was indeed a very lucrative career for me. After meeting him, I also met his two deputies, Dr. T.D. Dogra, at that time working as an Assistant Professor, and Dr. P.C. Dikshit working as lecturer. I had an instant liking for both of them too, and very soon I was convinced that forensic medicine was for me. I have never repented that decision since. In fact I have come to love this specialty so much, that if I were to reborn again, most probably I would choose this specialty once again as a career (unless of course my eclectic nature forces me to take up some other profession, say, philosophy, mathematics or may be music!)

I collected my medical examination forms and returned to my department (Internal Medicine) at Safdarjang Hospital. My Senior Resident used to be one Dr. Madan, and I think he was aghast when I told him that I had decided to join forensic medicine. I tendered my resignation immediately, but I was asked to continue till I got a formal call from AIIMS, which of course was subject to passing my medical tests.

Professor Jagdish Chandra at author's wedding - 16 March 1983. From Left to right: Mrs. T.D. Dogra, Pr
myself, Aparna, Sunny (a young guest)
(Click to enlarge photo.)



I joined the department of forensic medicine at AIIMS as a postgraduate student on 1 August 1979 (31st July being my last day in Internal Medicine), and I give credit to only two persons - the clerk who advised me to meet Professor Chandra, and Professor Chandra himself. If I am in Forensic Medicine today, it is because of these two people.

During the three years that I spent with him, I found him a very congenial and jovial person. He would laugh away most of our mistakes and would guide us for the future in a most friendly manner. He never let us feel that we were so raw in forensic medicine. I have too many memories associated with him, but I will mention just one.

When the Great *Qutb Minar* tragedy occurred on December 4, 1981, I was a third year Post Graduate Student. Just for recapitulation, *Qutb Minar* finds mention in the *Guinness Book of World*

Records as the tallest minaret in the world. It is 72.5 meters tall. Built in the 12th Century by the slave king Qutubuddin Aibak (after whom it is named), its radius at the base is 14.3 meters; it is just 2.75 meters at the top. A total of 369 steps within the minaret take you to the top. When you ascend these steps, you get a feeling as if you are ascending a vertical tunnel. Before electric lights were installed in 1959, it used to be pitch dark inside.

There was a little fee for ascending up the Minar, but on Fridays it used to be free. Because of this reason, there always used to be a larger crowd on Fridays. December 4, 1981 was a Friday, and as usual there was a large crowd. Suddenly the electricity failed and there was complete pandemonium inside. Everybody started running helter and skelter. In the ensuing mêlée 45 persons died of traumatic asphyxia. This incident remains as one of the most important historical instances of deaths by Traumatic Asphyxia. This day is still known in India as *Black Friday*.

All the bodies came to AIIMS for post-mortem. We were appalled. Professor Jagdish Chandra was a source of strength to us at that time. He personally remained present with us at the mortuary, guiding and advising us. The work went on till 11 pm in the night. AIIMS mortuary used to be in the basement in those days. It was cold there, but we kept working. Professor Chandra was a source of inspiration for us in such trying times.

Despite Dr. Chandra being a thorough academician, he had a more mundane human side too. He was fond of good food and good wine. During the three years we spent at the AIIMS, we used to have monthly parties at the massive lawn in front of his house. During these parties we used to sing, dance and crack jokes, besides of course eat food and drink good wine.

I passed my M.D. Examination on 30th June 1982, and once again he held a party in his house to commemorate this occasion. At that time the post of senior resident was not vacant in AIIMS, so quite reluctantly I joined Maulana Azad Medical College (MAMC) as a senior resident (on 25 August 1982). But I must confess, I always pined for a job in his department at the AIIMS.

Professor Jagdish Chandra at author's wedding reception- 17 March 1983. From Left to right: Professor myself, Aparna, Professor Chandra's daughter-in-law, Professor Chandra's son, Mrs. Chandra (Click to enlarge photo.)



When I went to give him my marriage invitation card (sometime in march 1983), he told me that the post of senior resident had fallen vacant at the AIIMS and I must join my alma mater. I immediately jumped for it, and gave an application to that effect at his residence itself.

I got married on 16th March 1983, and despite his busy schedule, he came with family to bless us. He also came the next day on our marriage reception. I will always cherish those moments. I joined AIIMS once again - this time as a senior resident in Forensic Medicine - on 31 March 1983. I still very clearly remember his words on the first day of my joining. We were sitting around the big round table in the Old Nursing College Building (where our department used to be). He came and addressing the whole department said, "*Ab yeh hamare kutumb main phir shamil ho gaye hain*" (He has once again joined our family). This shows he always considered us as part of his family!

I held this post till 31 May 1985. When my son Tarun was born on 20 December 1984, he came to the hospital to bless the newly born. Later he even came to my house with family to bless my son.

When I got an offer to join the Maulana Azad Medical College as an Assistant Professor (sometime in early 1985), I went to him with a heavy heart and asked for his advice. So much did I like him, that I was prepared to work with him just as a senior resident for the whole life. And had this been technically possible, probably I would have done just that. But the post of senior resident is a tenure post, and one can only work three years on this post. Like a good and experienced person, he advised me to join MAMC. Even after I joined MAMC, I used to meet him often, sometimes at the department, and sometimes at his residence.

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It is difficult for anyone associated with him to be able to forget him. The 3rd International Conference of the *Indian Congress of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology* was held on 30-31 March 2002. Dr. R.K.Sharma was the chief organizer of this conference. He is now number two in the department of Forensic Medicine, after Professor T.D. Dogra. Very rightly he honored Professor Jagdish Chandra by holding the first *Professor Jagdish Chandra Memorial Oration* on 30 March 2002 (Saturday). It was held from 1400-1430 hours as a completely separate session (Session IV). The speaker was Professor Krishan Vij from Government Medical College, Chandigarh, who spoke on a very topical subject - *Biological Warfare and Medical Profession*. With the recent spate of anthrax cases in USA, this was indeed a very timely subject. The Chairman was Professor B.B.L. Aggarwal, retired Principal of the University College of Medical Sciences (UCMS) and co-chairmen were Dr. N.K. Aggarwal from UCMS and myself.

The whole forensic medicine community of the world offers their heartfelt condolences to his wife and children. May his soul rest in peace.

-Anil Aggrawal
Editor-in-Chief

(Inputs from a write up by Professor T.D. Dogra. This leaflet was distributed on the first day of the 3rd International Conference of Indian Congress of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, to all delegates)

For more information, you may want to get in touch with Professor T.D. Dogra, or Dr. R.K.Sharma of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences. They can be contacted by Email.