

humour. Dr Noshir Wadia was often teased for taking his responsibilities too seriously. (Dr Wadia's leg was also pulled for the little 'beetle' [Fiat] he used for a car while Dr Gajendra Sinh gloried in his huge British Aston-Martin limousine.) And when Dr Gajendra Sinh was in the company of Dr Jimmy Sidhva, our consultant neuroradiologist, guffaws were the rule, each inspiring the other to greater humour.

Dr Gajendra Sinh retired from his *alma mater* in 1977. At Dr Shantilal Mehta's request, he had started another department of neurosurgery at the new Jaslok Hospital in 1972. He served this hospital to the end. As a final act of service to his teacher, he served as the chief trustee of the research fund set up by Dr Mehta till it was wound up.

Among the honours received by Dr Gajendra Sinh is that of being the President of the Neurological Society of India in 1975. (He had served it well in the capacity of Secretary [1965–75] and

had organized the 3rd Asian and Oceanian Congress of Neurology in Bombay.)

Pneumonia, 'the old man's friend', helped him lapse into a state of reduced consciousness and slip peacefully away in his sleep.

Mr Vijay Merchant, the great cricketer, was Dr Gajendra Sinh's neighbour. Mr Merchant cherished the motto 'Play the game'. Dr Gajendra Sinh played an outstanding innings and did so with a straight bat. His final retirement to the pavilion on high was in the fullness of time and deserves applause.

SUNIL PANDYA

*Department of Neurosurgery  
Jaslok Hospital  
Mumbai  
Maharashtra*

### S.S. Agarwal

(5 July 1941–2 December 2013)



#### A VISIONARY CLINICIAN AND A SCIENTIST *PAR* *EXCELLENCE*

Dr S.S. Agarwal, fondly known as 'SS' to many, left for his heavenly abode on 2 December 2013 after a massive heart attack. His sad and sudden demise has left a big void in the field of research in medicine and biological sciences in India. Dr Agarwal was a Georgian and completed his medical education

from King George's Medical College, Lucknow with a record-breaking number of awards and gold medals. He went to the USA and worked in research laboratories, which influenced his career and perhaps the future of medical genetics in India. His intelligent and visionary mind could foresee the coming era of molecular medicine. After coming back to India, Dr Agarwal was instrumental in the planning and execution of many Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)-sponsored research projects in Genetics, including the study of periconceptional folic acid therapy in the prevention of neural tube defects. This was the beginning of medical genetics in India. His research work was duly recognized and he was conferred with many prestigious awards including the Shanti Swaroop Bhatnagar award and the Vigyan Ratna award.

He played a key role in the inception of Sanjay Gandhi Postgraduate Institute of Medical Sciences (SGPGIMS) at Lucknow where in 1990 he started a formal 3-year DM programme in medical genetics for medical postgraduates. This course led to the establishment of the discipline of medical genetics in India. The course, the only one of its kind at present in India, turns out trained medical experts in clinical as well as laboratory genetics. He started with the 'A' of the 'A T G C' of genetics and

established up-to-date medical genetics facilities in patient care and research. He was happy to see many SGPGIMS-trained medical geneticists heading different medical genetics centres in India. As his first DM (Medical Genetics) student, I had the opportunity to work closely with him for almost 25 years.

He was an astute clinician and a knowledge bank. His algorithmic approach in clinical settings, voracious appetite for recent knowledge and stress on medical research influenced and astonished everyone around him. He emphasized the need for laboratory work and involvement in basic research for clinicians. This turned out to be the strength of students and faculty members of SGPGIMS. What is said about medical genetics is also true for clinical immunology. The Department of Clinical Immunology with its DM programme established by Dr Agarwal has been a trendsetter in India. He not only contributed to education in medical genetics and clinical immunology, but also planned and organized academic activities and research ethos at SGPGIMS. Dr Agarwal guided the growth of SGPGIMS in the capacity of Dean and Director of the Institute. His methodical approach, and knowledge of technology and equipment helped the Institute immensely. After his superannuation from SGPGIMS, Dr Agarwal joined as Director of the prestigious Advanced Centre for Treatment, Research and Education in Cancer (ACTREC) at Mumbai. Under his leadership, ACTREC has developed into a state-of-art cancer treatment and research facility which now does excellent work in cancer genetics and genetic counselling for familial cancers.

Dr Agarwal not only worked for SGPGIMS, but also guided research in medicine and biological sciences in India by heading many committees of the ICMR, Department of Biotechnology, Department of Science and Technology, etc. His ability to read thoroughly, analyse and discuss coherently the projects under consideration helped many young researchers in India. Age was never a deterrent for him. Even until a few days before his death, he was enthusiastically participating in conferences and other academic deliberations, encouraging and inspiring younger generations of doctors to broaden their clinical perspective and

explore the molecular basis of disease and treatment. His ability to keep abreast with the latest developments in the field of medicine and his instant grasp of scientific concepts were truly amazing. He was a 'physician–scientist' in the true sense of the word. Such intelligent, visionary clinician and scientific leader is a rarity and Dr Agarwal's demise leaves a big void in genetics and medical research in India which is difficult to fill. I myself and many of his students and colleagues all over India will miss him; but we will always remember him as the father of medical genetics in India.

His wife Dr Pramila Agarwal, a practising pathologist, a warm person and a strong pillar of the family, was a great support to him. He was surrounded by intelligent family members to suit his personality and he used to enjoy scientific and other intellectual

discussions with them. His son Rahul is a computer engineer in the USA and his daughter Rama an architect in Delhi. I pray to God to give them the strength to cope with the loss. Our medical genetics community in India will continue to work hard to fulfil his dreams. That is the greatest tribute we can pay him and I am sure that would be his last will.

SHUBHA PHADKE  
*Department of Medical Genetics*  
*Sanjay Gandhi Postgraduate Institute of Medical Sciences*  
*Lucknow*  
*Uttar Pradesh*  
*shubharaopadke@gmail.com*

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### *Obituaries*

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