



Dr. Ramesh Chandra: An Icon of Plastic Surgery in India

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Dr. Ramesh Chandra was born on 9 August 1940 at Moga, Punjab, in an affluent Aryasamaji Punjabi Agarwal family. His father was a general physician and mother a God-fearing pious housewife. His parents moved to Khatauli in District Muzaffarnagar in the state of Uttar Pradesh where he completed his primary schooling. After completing primary schooling, Dr. Chandra moved to Meerut at the age of 15 years where he did B.Sc. from the Meerut University. He was interested in pursuing medicine like his father, and at the age of 17 years, he got admission to study medicine at the prestigious King George's Medical University (KGMU), Lucknow, in 1957. Following his graduation in 1962, he completed his M.S. in general surgery and was appointed as a lecturer in the Department of Surgery. After completion of M.S. in plastic surgery from the same institute, he was appointed as a lecturer in the Department of Plastic Surgery under the guidance of his mentor Prof. R.N Sharma and then became a reader in plastic surgery thereafter (►Fig. 1).

He traveled to England in 1978 to the world-famous Stoke Mandeville Hospital, Aylesbury, the United Kingdom, under the mentorship of Mr. Bruce Bailey the renowned microsurgeon (►Fig. 2). During his training, he also cleared the Fellowship of the Royal Colleges of Surgeons (FRCS) examination in the first attempt which was considered an astounding achievement at that time.

He returned to India and joined the department fresh with new ideas and knowledge and gained a senior position of a professor of plastic surgery. He became the head of the Department of Plastic Surgery in the December of 1981 and the principal and the dean of KGMU from 1998 to 2000. Reminiscing his years devoted to the plastic surgery department, he contributed to gradual and comprehensive building of the department. In those times, the department

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Fig. 1 Dr. Ramesh Chandra (09.08.1940–08.07.2021)

was nascent and ►Fig 1 was limited to just a ground-floor building. During his long two-decade tenure of headship, he was able to mobilize resources and added the first floor, new equipment, instrumentation, new posts, and trained hundreds of plastic surgeons. He worked selflessly for the department all these years and soon with the hard work

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Fig. 2 Dr. Ramesh Chandra with his mentor Dr. Bruce Bailey and Dr. Desai at the Stoke Mandeville Hospital, the United Kingdom, in 1979.

and good results of surgery, the patient input rapidly increased and the department grew in leaps and bounds under his able mentorship. He appointed faculty members in the department for the continued growth of the department including Dr. S.K. Bhatnagar and Dr. A.K. Singh who themselves excelled in their careers both in the department and the Association of Plastic Surgeons of India. He invited international and national key faculties in the department regularly for knowledge enhancement and for establishing mutually productive professional relationships.

He trained hundreds of plastic surgeons who are making their names in far-reaching corners of the country and the world. His contributions were not limited to the department but were spread over in all the fields including academics, teaching, and clinical research. He has to his credit more than 100 scientific publications including papers in scientific journals, theses, book chapters, and books in plastic surgery. Some of his notable contributions include new techniques for cleft lip repair, cleft lip nose repair, and many new flaps for hand reconstruction. The operation of cleft lip was his favorite, and he was an expert craftsman of the technique of lower triangular method of cleft lip repair. His reconstructed lips have remained symmetrical and shapely even after decades of surgery. He devised a new all-encompassing “definition of plastic surgery” which has been acknowledged in the International Textbook of Plastic Surgery by Peter Neligan. He had gifted hands and was a master of stitch craft. His skin sutures appeared like they have been applied by a robot with precision, neatness, and uncanny symmetry.

Dr. Chandra contributed a lot to his alma mater while working as faculty in the Department of Plastic Surgery and also as the principal and the dean. He was the president of the Athletic Association of KGMU and contributed to developing sports infrastructure and culture in the university. He was also an officer in charge of the central library and had the opportunity to improve the facilities and created a computer section and other ancillary facilities for students visiting the KGMU central library.

During his tenure as the principal of KGMU, the foundation of the state-of-the-art Trauma Centre was laid by the then Prime Minister Sri Atal Behari Vajpayee.

He was awarded the prestigious Dr. BC Roy National Award by the President of India for his all-round contribution to plastic surgery (► Fig. 3). He served his alma mater with full dedication and maintained the past glory of his university. After superannuation from KGMU, he served as an executive counselor of the university.

Dr. Chandra also decorated important positions in the Association of Plastic Surgeons of India. He served two terms as an editor of the Indian Journal of Plastic Surgery. He was instrumental in developing the Indian journal in terms of visibility, quality, and always encouraged the submission of articles by younger faculty and residents. He was also elected as the president of the association in 1997 and organized a memorable annual meeting of plastic surgery in Lucknow.

Dr. Ramesh Chandra was tall, slim, and very handsome with a pleasing personality, a teetotaler who loved simple home-cooked food and had a disciplined lifestyle. Dr. Chandra maintained a high level of physical fitness and



Fig. 3 Dr. Ramesh Chandra receiving the prestigious Dr. B.C. Roy National Award for excellence in plastic surgery from the President of India in 1997.

was an avid tennis player. He used to play in the evenings at the verdant grass courts of KGMU.

He was truly an icon, a living legend in his times and a father figure of plastic surgery especially in the state of Uttar Pradesh. He was an ideal father, loving son, exceptional husband, helping brother to his siblings, and a generous grandfather. He leaves a rich legacy of second and third generations of doctors and a gene pool of high traditions, moral values and excellence which will continue in his future generations. His wife, Prof. Padam Kumari Agarwal is a much-respected teacher in pathology and served at the KGMU and is known for expertise in the technique of fine-needle aspiration cytology in the state and beyond. His elder son, Dr. Rajiv Agarwal is trained in craniofacial surgery in Dallas and is currently serving as the head of the Department of Plastic Surgery at SGPGI, Lucknow. He received continuous mentorship from his father that resulted in numerous publications and innovations in plastic surgery spanning over more than two decades. His younger son, Dr. Sanjeev Agarwal excelled in orthopaedics, is a book author in orthopaedics, examiner in FRCS orthopaedics, an expert in revision knee arthroplasty, and is working as a consultant at Cardiff University, United King-

dom. His elder daughter-in-law, Dr. Tulika Chandra is credited with building up and managing one of the largest departments of transfusion medicine in the country at KGMU where she is heading the department. His younger daughter-in-law, Dr. Gaurav Jyoti is a leading consultant radiologist in the United Kingdom and specializes in breast radiology. His legacy continues to shine in his five grandchildren among whom three have chosen the field of medicine and are doing well in their careers. One is studying engineering at Oxford, the United Kingdom, and the youngest also aspires to become a doctor.

He was gentle, soft-spoken, caring, and abjured prolixity. He remained fit and healthy in the pink of health even till the very last day and passed away peacefully and painlessly after a massive cardiac event. He leaves behind no debts but only credits and a sea of well-wishers with whom he came in contact with in his lifetime. His life and times are truly a learning textbook with numerous pages of hard work, honesty, dedication, commitment, and accomplishment worthy of emulation.

No legacy is as rich as honesty—*William Shakespeare*

Conflict of Interest

None declared.