

Icon of the Issue

Dr. Anil Chadha



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Karmany evadhikaras te ma phalesu kadacana ma karma-phala-hetur bhur ma te sango 'stv akarmani.'

'You have a right to perform your prescribed duty, but you are not entitled to the fruits of action. Never consider yourself the cause of the results of your activities, and never be attached to not doing your duty'.

Bhagavad Gita 2.47.

If at all anything can explain in brief about Dr. Anil Chadha, it would be the above words quoted in the *Bhagavad Gita*; they aptly summarise his essence.

A great teacher, compassionate healer, a loving family man, a loyal friend, a thoughtful mentor and trustworthy leader.

He had a very sharp and inquisitive mind and could size up a man's potential accurately which helped him in his multivarious roles as an administrator in the latter half of his life and career.

He was the second child amongst four siblings, born in Agra on 3rd February 1950, his father an Army officer and mother a homemaker whole he adores; she was an enduring influence in his life.

An anecdote he loved to share, pertains to his childhood when the family *nai* or barber predicted that he would be a fabulous '*silaiakar*' (one who sews or stitches) 1 day. In retrospect, the words came true in a different sense; he was truly a great mender of body mind and souls.

He was a strict disciplinarian and a self-confessed workaholic apart from being a voracious reader, his range of subjects varied from fiction to highly intellectual abstracts, he had a way with his words and his command over English was fabulous, which was reflected in the choice of his words carefully articulated to convey a subtle criticism or in-depth meaning.

In his younger days, he was a bright student and was probably impressed by his nana who was a famous dentist in Agra, though his father wanted him to be an army officer, he had his mind fixed to serve the humanity in a noble way. His early schooling was in St George's school in Agra Cantonment and was spent mostly in the company of his mother and siblings as his father was posted out at different Army stations; hence, his mother was a major influence in his life and young Anil was good in studies and even got double promotions, the family had stayed in different locations of India such as Jabalpur, Srinagar and Dalhousie which had given him a cosmopolitan outlook and opened up his mind.

After his schooling, he joined Agra Medical College in 1968 after clearing the UP Board examinations; he secured a gold medal in forensic medicine, an indicator of his sharp mind and deductive reasoning a hallmark of his astute mind.

Jnana Yoga is the path of knowledge, wisdom, introspection and contemplation. It involves deep exploration of the nature of our being by systematically exploring and setting aside false identities.

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As stated in the *Bhagavad Gita* 2.55.

*śrī-bhagavān uvācaprajāhāti yadā kāmānsarvān pārtha
mano-gatānātmany evātmanā tuṣṭaḥsthita-prajñas
tadocyate.*

‘When a man puts away all the desires of his mind, O Partha (Arjuna), and when his spirit is content in itself, then is he called stable in intelligence.’

Dr. Chadha though not overtly religious was inwardly deeply spiritual a true karma yogi, he was particularly compassionate to the neglected and downtrodden particularly to the burn victims and persons afflicted by Hansen’s disease. He was able to instil his compassion to all his students by his actions and not mere words.

In 1973, he completed his undergraduate course and joined Internship, followed thereafter by a Housejob in Surgery under the famous surgeon BD Sharma (who was a crucial inspiration in Dr. Chadha’s career), was trained in the UK, a pioneer in urology and head-and-neck cancer at SN Medical College Agra, besides the medical college, also had plastic surgery and burns facility.

It was here that Dr. Anil Chadha met his life companion and better half Dr. Indu Sharma who was his junior in the same unit.

Dr. BD Sharma wanted his protege Anil to become a Uro Surgeon and Indu to become a plastic surgeon initially that explains a lot about Dr. Chadha’s avid interest in hypospadias and penile reconstructions.

Subsequently, he had a paid post of Resident Casualty Officer which helped him complete his residency of 2 years in General Surgery. In 1976, he got his gold medal from Agra University and stood first in University examinations in General Surgery, incidentally his dissertation was on Carcinoma cheek, which must have spurred his interest in reconstruction of face defects.

He appeared for the PG entrance examinations in PGI Chandigarh in 1978 and was selected for M.Ch. Plastic Surgery in his first attempt, in the famous Department of Plastic Surgery then headed by CBK, the father of modern Indian plastic surgery, who was a major influence in Dr. Anil Chadha’s thought process, though by the time he joined the department Dr. CBK had retired and Dr. Sawhney headed the department, along with Dr. Chari

and Dr. Mitra, all of them were also major influencers in his career. In July 1980, he successfully completed his M.Ch. Plastic Surgery and joined Maulana Azad Medical College, Department of Burns and Plastic Surgery under Dr. I D Tiwary as a Senior Resident in August 1980, it was during this period that he decided to get married to Dr. Indu Sharma who had become an anaesthesiologist and was working in GB Pant Medical College, it was also during the same period that she applied on his behalf by a quirk of interesting circumstances for the post of assistant professor in Plastic Surgery in BJMC Ahmedabad, the play of destiny subtly unfolding as series of coincidences, but with divine certitude of karma.

By then, he had decided to make teaching and academics his career inspired by his mentor Dr. BD Sharma.

Thus, began his sparkling career which was predestined to touch many a lives of aspiring plastic surgeons and patients akin to a domino effect.

He was selected through GPSC by his illustrious predecessor Dr. P K Bilwani for the post, based on merit on 10th January 1981, and very soon he joined the post and decided to get married on 25th January to his soulmate Dr. Indu Chadha, who supported his ideals wholeheartedly; subsequently, he joined the fledgling Department of Plastic Surgery as the sole plastic surgeon with none above and none below, originally the Department of Plastic Surgery at BJMC and Civil Hospital was started by Dr. JR Jaju, who was the pioneer of Plastic Surgery in the state of Gujarat.

Dr. Chadha’s astute wisdom and knowledge transcended as devotion to his work and to his patients’ welfare, he could see the God in every afflicted person and he lived his ideal in real life, that, service to humanity is service to God, which was his motto.

As is well established in the traditional bhakti yoga, the path of devotion is emotion, love, compassion, and service to God and others. All actions are done in the context of remembering the Divine.

*patram pushpam phalam toyam yo me bhaktya prayacchati
tad aham bhakty-upahritam ashnamī prayatatmanah.*

‘Whoever offers me with devotion a leaf, a flower, a fruit or a little water-that, so offered devotedly by the pure-minded, I accept’.

Bhagavad Gita.

He never believed in self-aggrandisement and always kept a very low profile despite his lofty accomplishments as a teacher par excellence, as an accomplished plastic surgeon with a mastery in the field of cleft surgeries, especially in bilateral clefts, in terms of sheer numbers his work was colossal, burn injuries, reconstructive surgery of hand and peripheral nerves particularly in the field of Hansen's disease, he was well versed in a wide range of the entire spectrum of plastic surgery ranging from gender reassignment surgery to congenital anomalies.

Whenever I think of my teacher who true to his nature left his body on Teacher's day, I am compelled to remember C. Rajagopalachari's comment to Adi Shankara's Bhaja Govindam.

'Adi Shankaracharya wrote a number of vedantic works for imparting knowledge of the Self and the universal spirit. The way of devotion, is not different from the way of knowledge or Jnana'.

When intelligence matures and lodges securely in the mind, it becomes wisdom. When wisdom is integrated with life and issues out in action, it becomes Bhakti. Knowledge, when it becomes fully mature, is Bhakti. If it does not get transformed into Bhakti, such knowledge is useless tinsel. To believe that Jnana and Bhakti, knowledge and devotion are different from each other, is ignorance. If Sri Adi Shankara himself who drank the ocean of Jnana as easily as one sip's water from the palm of one's hand, sang in his later years, hymns to develop devotion, it is enough to show that Jnana and Bhakti are one and the same. Similarly, in Dr. Chadha's life, his knowledge and devotion to his work were one and the same.

Balancing personal goals and professional goals is an art usually blessed by him. Dr. Chadha did both diligently and never fell in the trap of escapism in either of the front.

During his terminal days, all his students arranged a surprise party, where all his students, trainees and colleagues assembled in a suite and the look on his face when he entered the room was worth all the efforts, he spoke from his heart about each and every one of his students their strengths and weakness and it was an expression of love, inspiration and reconciliation in many ways inexpressible by mere words, the language

was both verbal and nonverbal, and it was a wonderful worthy culmination of an endless relationship seamlessly transcending, to an eternal continuity of student-teacher relationship exemplified in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

He always wanted to co-author a book on plastic surgery someday, as we frequently discussed, which would not be a run of the mill textbook which I hope if God wills will materialise within my lifetime.

Furthermore, during his last speech, he felt that I was most suited to teaching and I sincerely wish I could fulfil his wishes.

Some of his favourite quotes were:

- 'There's many a slip between the cup and the lip.'
- 'Give every devil his due.'

He was a great follower of humility and compassion and instilled it in the minds of his student a favourite quote was from *the Bible* Matthew 18:1-4, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, 'Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.'

Another was, for all those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

These words ring true, especially, in this era of aggressive marketing, with publish or perish and all the push to be noticed and in the forefront which finally seems so hollow and pointless.

He advocated doing quality work quietly, constantly innovating and being compassionate, he shunned being in the limelight and when pushed into limelight due to circumstances beyond his control, he donned it gracefully but with a little discomfort, extolling the works of his juniors and others.

Dr. Anil Chadha passed away after fighting a dreaded cancer valiantly for many years, many of his patients had no clue that he was fighting serious illness, as he relentlessly continued doing his duty till the very end, he was the quintessential sthithapragna explained in the *Gita*, till he succumbed on 1st July 2015, aptly celebrated as Doctors' Day.

Thangavel: Dr. Anil Chadha

Dr. Chadha was a rare breed of human race, beyond comparison.

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