

# Padmavati Sivaramakrishna Iyer—The Doyenne of Cardiology (1917–2020)

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Dr. Padmavati Sivaramakrishna Iyer was born in Rangoon, Burma (Myanmar), on June 20, 1917 to a Barrister father with five siblings. She did her medical graduation (MBBS) from Rangoon Medical College securing highest marks in the final examination. Her family returned to India at the end of the Second World War. She went to England to pursue her higher studies in Medicine, wherein she worked at National Heart Hospital and National Chest Hospital, Queen Square, London. She did her Fellowship of Royal College of Physician (FRCP) from London in 1949. During this period, she developed interest in cardiology which remained her first love throughout her life. Incidentally, her two sisters were renowned neurologist and gynecologist, respectively. Soon after FRCP, she went to Sweden for training in cardiology for 3 months. She then went for scholarship at Johns Hopkins University at Baltimore in Maryland of the United States to study with noted cardiologist Dr. Helen Taussig in 1952. Later, she joined Harvard Medical School to work under Dr. Paul Dudley White, the Father of Modern Cardiology.

She returned to India in 1953 to commence her career as a lecturer in Medicine at Lady Hardinge Medical College (LHMC) in Delhi. She started a regular cardiology clinic at LHMC. She was promoted to full Professorship and Headship at LHMC in due course of time. This was the time when All India Institute of Medical Sciences was coming up in the national capital in a big way, where Prof. Sujoy B. Roy was also trying to set up Cardiac Catheterization laboratory in the Department of Cardiology. Far south, at Christian Medical College in Vellore, another noted lady Cardiologist Dr. K. I. Vytilingam too was trying her best to develop state-of-the-art Cardiology Department. But such was the charisma and dedication of madam Dr. Padmavati that she made a deep impact in the cardiology fraternity and organized first ever World Congress of Cardiology in Delhi and invited the top galaxies of cardiology from all over the world including Dr. Paul Dudley White. This Congress kept madam Padmavati on such a pedestal that she never looked back thereafter. She conducted epoch making epidemiological studies on rheumatic heart disease, cor



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pulmonale, hypertension, and coronary artery disease ever since she joined LHMC. She formed All India Heart Foundation (AIHF) in 1962 along with group of physicians and industrialist Ashok Jain of Bennett, Coleman & Co. Ltd.

On account of her sterling qualities of leadership and academic brilliance, she was made Director-Principal of Maulana Azad Medical College (MAMC) in 1967. As the Director-Principal, she was awarded the Padma Bhushan by Government of India in 1967. Later, she was awarded Fellowship of the American College of Cardiology and the Fellowship of the National Academy of Medical Sciences (India). She developed Department of Cardiology in MAMC and laid down the foundations for Doctor of Medicine (DM) in Cardiology at Govind Ballabh Pant (GB Pant) Hospital where she subsequently became Director. Here, some of her illustrious students Prof. Khalilullah, Prof. Upendra Kaul, Prof. Sanjay Tyagi, and Dr. Vinod Sharma got their training and enjoyed her blessings. Due to her passion and zeal for teaching and research, she soon became a legend among her students. She was a born teacher who inspired generations of physicians to choose cardiology as their specialty. Her unquenchable brilliance and undaunted spirit to remain active always would live in the minds of innumerable students taught by her and the grateful patients. She rightly earned the reputation being called as Helen Taussig of India (the famous lady cardiologist who pioneered Blalock–Taussig shunts [BTS] procedure for the tetralogy of Fallot [TOF]). She retired as the Director (Principal) of MAMC in 1978.

Never to be tired, Dr. Padmavati established National Heart Institute (NHI) as a clinical and research wing of the All India Heart Foundation in 1981. This soon became one of the top cardiac centers of the country, now catering to all aspects of cardiology services, thanks to the dedicated efforts of its stalwarts and her students, Drs. O.P. Yadava and Vinod Sharma. The writer of this column had the privilege of being examined by her in 1987 for PhD in cardiology at Banaras Hindu University. Her zeal for academics was such that, even

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at the age of over hundred years, she would be reading all cardiology journals and ticking topics for the weekly journal club meetings for Diplomate of National Board (cardiology) students and enquiring about the outcomes of monthly mortality meetings with senior colleagues. She also formed a World Health Organization (WHO) Collaborative Centre of Preventive Cardiology at NHI and always led from the front in matters of preventive cardiology and celebrated the World Heart Day punctually and regularly every year. She was awarded the India's second highest civilian award the Padma Vibhushan in 1992 by the Government of India.

On account of her monumental research work, she was awarded fellowship of the European Society of Cardiology in 2007 and Emeritus Professorship of Medicine and Cardiology by University of Delhi.

She was a voracious reader. In her younger days, she used to swim briskly. After a very exciting and satisfying academic

and professional journey, spanning almost seven decades, she left for her heavenly abode on August 29, 2020, valiantly fighting novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Thus came the end of an era. As rightly said, legends never die, they remain in the minds and hearts of those who adore them. Let me recapitulate few lines from Mundaka Upanishad which fit so aptly for her life:

**यथा नद्यः स्यन्दमानाः समुद्रेऽस्तं गच्छन्ति नामरूपे विहाय।**

**तथा विद्वान् नामरूपाद् विमुक्तः परात्परं पुरुषमुपैति दिव्यम्॥८॥**

Meaning: "just as a river's flow is lost in an ocean, giving up both their name and form; just so, the knower, freed from name and form, the *atma* attains the unification with *Divya Parmatma*, the *Virat Purusha*, who is beyond the *avyakta*."

Rest in peace God Mother of Cardiology.