



Ajit Kumar Dutta (1930 - 2004)

“He was not just a healer but a philosopher of healing...a wonderful, humane, soothing practitioner and theorist of medicine, and the world is poorer for his absence”

John Updike, in a personal letter after the death of Thomas B. Fitzpatrick (J Am Acad Dermatol, August 2004)

The above adage suits Dr. Ajit Kumar Dutta perfectly to the core as well, one of the most respected and beloved teachers and practitioners and certainly one of the doyens of modern dermatology in India.

Dr. Dutta was born on 1.12.1930 in Malda, a small town in erstwhile undivided Bengal. After completing his matriculation with flying colors in 1946 from Malda Zilla School, he graduated in Medicine from R. G. Kar Medical College, Calcutta University in 1953. He received his DTM and H in 1957 and stood first in order of merit in D. Dermat in 1960. He did his MD in Dermatology from Calcutta University in 1976.

Vitiligo captured his attention in 1960 when he joined the Dermatology Department of Calcutta Medical College and hospitals as a clinical tutor. In 1964 he completed his Ph.D. with his thesis topic being ‘Physiological study of human vitiliginous skin in tropics and its correlation with clinical observations’. His article ‘A clinical study of 650 vitiligo cases and their classification’ was cited in the Yearbook of Dermatology (1970) and was subsequently referred to in the book ‘Dermatology in general medicine’. In 1971 his essay ‘Etiopathogenesis of vitiligo and its management’ won him the ‘Award of Merit’ from the Skin Institute, New Delhi.

His outstanding work drew international acclaim and he was invited to present his observations at Cambridge in 1974. In the same year he was awarded the ‘Coates Medal’ by the University of Calcutta in recognition of his scientific publications. His monograph “Neural

implications in vitiligo” was awarded the “Certificate of Honor” by the Scientific Committee of the Castellani-Reiss Award at the 5th International Congress of Dermatology at Mexico in 1984.

Dr. Dutta became the editor of Indian Journal of Dermatology in 1980. During the next 5 years he tried his best to uphold the standard of this prestigious journal despite financial and infrastructural hindrances. He was the organizing Secretary of 16th National Conference of IADVL held in Calcutta in 1988.

He touched the zenith in his government service as well. He was the Professor and Head, Dept of Dermatology, University College of Medicine, and then the Secretary of post graduate studies. He took early voluntary retirement from service in 1985. He was associated with a number of institutions including Institute of Child Health, Goenka Hospital, and J. N. Roy Hospital. He contributed to the chapter on pigmentary disorders in the IADVL Textbook of Dermatology and was co-author of the book “Occupational and Industrial Dermatoses”.

Dr. Dutta was a person of varied interests. He was a voracious reader, an acclaimed writer and a teacher of the highest caliber. His soothing nature and unassuming attitude touched every person. He was very active as a superconsultant and constantly kept himself updated with advancements in his field till 13th May 2004 when he suffered a massive brainstem hemorrhage and succumbed on 19th May 2004 in a Kolkata hospital.

Dr. Dutta is survived by his wife Rikta and two daughters. This great person and his wonderful work will leave an indelible imprint on the minds of many generations of dermatologists.

Kalyan Banerjee, Koushik Lahiri