Andreas Vesalius (1514-1564)

JV Pai-Dhungat*, Falguni Parikh*

Vesalius was a Belgian anatomist. His father, Andre Wesal was an apothecary. His mother was an English Woman. After initial studies, he went to France and studied medicine at Montpellier. Later he went to Padua, where his professor of anatomy was Jacob Sylvius.

For some reason Jacob Sylvius, crossed with him and remained his enemy till the end. Vesalius was professor of anatomy at Padua for some time. Sylvius had condemned his former student as a "madman whose pestilential teachings were poisoning Europe". When he was discredited, even by his other colleagues and students, he left Padua, at the age of 30, never to return again. He accepted an invitation to the Spanish court in 1559, where he became physician at the court of Phillip-II.

Vesalius was the greatest anatomist of the 16th century and broke away from Galanic tradition using the human body for his textbook. He had to obtain bodies for dissection. This was solved, by body snatching (a practice seen in horror movies today), which led to grave robbing. Known as father of modern anatomy, he published his great work "De Corporis Humani Fabrica" in 1543 at the age of 29 and claimed to have corrected 200 of Galen's errors. Fabrica owes much of its greatness to its illustrator, Jan Stephan Van Calcar, a Flemish painter who was a student of the famous Titian. The drawings are still among the most accurate and natural representation of human anatomy in existence. The anatomy courses taught by Vesalius were well attended. His students were required to make their own dissections, a practice that is standard in medical colleges today. In spite of his great contribution to anatomy, his name is not associated with any important structure in the body.

Eighteen years later, after the death of his old enemy Sylvius, Vesalius was invited back to Padua to take the chair of anatomy. Considering this as his moment of celebration, he decided to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem before returning to Padua. On the return journey, he faced a shipwreck during a violent storm, and died in 1564, on a small island off the Greek coast, where he was buried.