Indian Neurologists

HV Srinivas

Dr. Baldev Singh (1904 – 1998)

Dr. Baldev Singh had a very interesting, passionate and chequered professional career spanning over several decades. He was an eminent neurologist and a neuroscientist. He was known as “Grandfather Neuron or Papa Neuron” for his unabiding and passionate interest in Neurosciences.

Dr Baldev Singh was born into an aristocratic family, in Gandasighwala a village near Amritsar, on 6th April 1904. He completed his MBBS from King Edward Medical College at Lahore in 1927 with several awards and gold medals to his credit. His interest in the study of the nervous system began during his undergraduate days and he spent a lot of time dissecting the brain. He went to UK in 1928 and worked under several stalwarts of Neurology -- Dr Russel Brain, Dr Kinneir Wilson and Dr Critchley. After completing his MRCP in 1930, he returned to India and started practicing in Amritsar. He established a lucrative practice, was very popular, led a luxurious life, was always immaculately dressed and moved around in luxurious cars. His interest in academic medicine and research led to him starting an experimental laboratory at his place where he built up a huge personal library.

His interest in EEG led him to contact Prof F A Gibbs at the Neuropsychiatry Institute in Chicago. In 1950 he went to Chicago to work with Prof Gibbs, leaving behind a lucrative practice of 18 years and starting a new career at the age of 45. Under the guidance of Prof. Gibbs he learnt to perform EEG and carried out experimental studies on cats examining the role of thalamus on spike and slow wave.

On his return to India in 1952 he moved to Vellore where he worked with Dr Chandy. He was inspired by Dr Chandy’s leadership and simple life which changed his life style altogether. After spending three years in Vellore he moved to Delhi in 1955 to establish Neurology services at Tirthram Shah Hospital. He continued to teach neurology at Lady Hardinge Medical College and Tirtharam Shah Hospital.

In 1965 he was invited to start the Neurosciences department at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences and was appointed as Prof of Neurology. After three years of his tenure he opted for fulltime research as Emeritus Professor in department of Physiology. He continued his research in collaboration with Dr Anand. His research activities included Epilepsy, sleep, consciousness, yoga, biofeedback, high altitude physiology, brain edema and heat hyper pyrexia.

In 1951, Drs Chandy, Ramamurthy, Narasimhan and Baldev Singh formed the Neurological Society of India (NSI). Dr Baldev Singh was the President of NSI in 1962 and has the rare distinction of serving a second term as President in 1971.

He was honoured with several awards which included Basanthi Devi Amir Chand Award, Air Marshal Subroto Mukherjee Award, Sir Nilratan Sircar Oration, Chandy Oration and National Academy of Medical Sciences Oration. He was founder Fellow of National Academy of Medical Sciences, Honorary fellow of Aero Medical Society of India and Indian National Science Academy. He was awarded the Padmabushan in 1971 by the President of India.

Dr. K.S. Mani (1928 – 2001)

Kalayanasaundaram Subramanian Mani (K S Mani) was born in Madurai on 18th October 1928. He entered the portals of Madras Medical College in 1947 to pursue MBBS and subsequently completed MD in General Medicine in 1956. He worked as Assistant Prof in Medicine at Madras Medical
College for the next two years.

His interest in Neurology was generated by Dr B Ramamurthi, who later persuaded him to join the All India Institute of Mental Health, Bangalore in April 1957, which was then known as a “Mental Hospital”.

Under the Colombo plan he spent two years, from 1960-1962, in UK, learning the intricacies of clinical neurology, neuro radiology, EGG and most importantly Neuro pathology in Queens Square and Maida Vale Hospital, London.

He returned to Bangalore in April 1962 by which time Dr R M Varma had joined the department of Neurosurgery. Together they built up the neuro sciences department and gradually the “Mental Hospital” came to be recognised as “Neuro Centre” which ultimately led to the formation of the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS) in 1974.

His contribution to the field of neurology included Hot Water Epilepsy, experimental neuro lathyrism and “south Indian paraplegia” which was later termed as “Tropical spastic paraplegia”.

He took premature retirement in 1978 and started private practice along with his neurologist wife Dr Geetha Rangan. During his practice he had amassed around ten thousand case files, which were meticulously maintained with every detail and follow up. While in private practice he made a seminal contribution to the field of epidemiology of epilepsy - the “Yelandur Project” -- with his colleagues. An important outcome of the project was the study of natural history of untreated epilepsy in the community. He has over 100 publications in National and International Journals and textbooks of epilepsy. He is known as “father of epilepsy” in India for his contribution to the epilepsy movement.

His abiding interest in social aspects of epilepsy and public education led to the formation of the Indian Epilepsy Association (IEA) in 1971 along with like-minded Neurologists. He was the Secretary General of IEA from 1991 to 1996 and President of IEA for two terms (1986 – 1989 and 1996-1998). He was the President of the Neurological Society of India from 1972 to 1973.

He was instrumental, by relentlessly pursuing for over 12 years, in getting the amendment to the “Hindu Marriage Act” which disqualified people with epilepsy from legally marrying. The amendment materialised in 1999.

He was a member of ICMR expert committee in Neurology, Fellow of the Academy of Sciences and Fellow of the Academy of Medical Sciences. On the international scene he was the Vice President (1989-1993) of the International Bureau for Epilepsy during which time he was also the Chairman of the Joint ILAE / IBE Commission on Developing Countries. He had the rare distinction of being bestowed with the three prestigious awards – the Ambassador for epilepsy award in 1975, social accomplishment award in 1997 and Life time achievement award in 2001 by the international organisations – International Bureau for Epilepsy (IBE) and International League Against Epilepsy (ILAE). Unfortunately he did not live to receive the award in person.

In his memory the “KS Mani Memorial Patient Session” was instituted during the annual conferences of IEA. He was a good singer and was trained in music. He was also a good dramatist and it was a pleasure to watch him demonstrate various types of epilepsy on the stage.

**References**

1. A Saga of Indian Neurology - Reflections of former Presidents 2011 Ed Dr H V Srinivas.