

Obituary

Prof. Kuldeep Singh Goleria



22nd September 1931 to 19th June 2017
Prof & Head of Plastic Surgery at KEM Mumbai
from Sept.1970 to Sept.1989.

Also fondly called as 'G' The letter G has its origin in the Indo-European root grrr from which many words have entered the lexicon of a variety of languages; 'grace' in English and 'Guru' in Sanskrit to cite only two. It was perhaps a poetic and fortuitous coincidence that his students came to call him as 'G'.

Dr. Goleria belonged to a generation which will soon become an important part of the history of plastic surgery in India when plastic surgeons came into being by way of circumstances, aptitude and inclination. Many of them were general surgeons, some had an ophthalmic background and others had qualifications in ear, nose and throat surgery. Dr. Goleria belonged to the latter category. They had little to fall back upon in terms of textbooks. Their organic growth was therefore evolutionary and experiential rather than through didactic methods. Their wait was long, growth was slow and opportunities to practice their craft were few. Patience was of the essence. Technology was yet to make its appearance and glamour was yet to envelope the speciality. In fact, the reality was exactly the opposite. Cases that involved drudgery and little reward formed the menu on the plastic surgeon's plate.

As this generation rose to head academic units in teaching hospitals, they encountered a young restless generation of students who expected hands-on training, greater clinical participation and finally a formal qualification. If that older generation could cope with the cultural paradigm shift, it is something that will be discussed informally over the years. Some of them became imperial, treating their students like subjects, while others withdrew into their shells. 'G' was perhaps the golden mean. Like the old-time Ustads of a Gharana, he sang patiently while his Shagirds patiently strummed on the Tanpura absorbing both the

principles as well as the nuances of what was the then classical plastic surgery. The performances were long and arduous because he firmly believed that, whatever be the scientific advances, what mattered in the end was rigor and endurance.

Science is a strange creature in pursuit of which we travel from one level of ignorance to another. Values on the other hand have endured over millennia though their origin is obscure. They are in the same class as mathematics, pristine and aloof, yet fundamental. In a world which changed dramatically and with great speed around him, 'G's' integrity, rectitude, morality and grace never did waver.

In front of this backdrop to count and narrate his scientific achievements which were numerous would be somewhat out of place. They are a small ornament on the body of this outstanding persona. He was both genteel and gentle and a gentleman to the core. He was a thorough professional never given to publicity. For years he travelled to the hills in the north of the country to serve the poor who possibly could not imagine the surgical largesse that was being showered on them.

The Association of Plastic Surgeons of India will be ever grateful to him for redrafting its constitution. He was to our association what Ambedkar was to India.

In the end, this quiet, dignified man left peacefully as was his wont through his life. He lived by the Geeta. She tells us,

Do not aspire for heaven\nor be afraid of hell

Do not criticize others\nor praise yourself

Work your way in peace\nand all will be well.

Ravin Thatte, Vinita Puri¹

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