

## Obituary

In the sad demise of Professor Ajit Kumar Basu, the nation has lost not only one of the doyens of thoracic and cardiovascular surgery in India but also a highly respected teacher, a brilliant research scientist and above all an immaculate gentleman.

Born in 1912, A.K. Basu had his early education at Hare School and Presidency College, Calcutta. He graduated from the Calcutta Medical College and obtained initial surgical training under the tutelage of Col. John Anderson, a formidable surgeon and teacher. After the Second World War, Dr. Basu proceeded to England where began his long association with the Royal College of Surgeons. He qualified for his FRCS in 1946. He was the first Indian to be appointed examiner of the Royal College and served as its Hunterian Professor.

Dr. Basu's tenure as Professor and Head of the Department of Surgery at the Nilratan Sircar Medical College, Calcutta from 1950 to 1955 was seen as the beginning of a brilliant career in general and orthopaedic surgery. However, while at Boston in 1952 as a Rockefeller Foundation Fellow, he was lured by the scope and the challenges of cardiac and vascular surgery. Subsequently, he joined the rare few who pioneered the training and practice of thoracic and cardiovascular surgery in India. With the establishment of a Postgraduate Medical Institute at the Presidency General Hospital, Calcutta, Professor Basu was invited to chair the Department of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery in 1958.

Professor Basu's interest in cardiovascular surgery couldn't wane his commitment to his basic speciality. As the Director of the Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, he



*Ajit Kumar Basu (1912-1986)*

maintained a unit in general surgery where he taught and conducted research in liver surgery and portal hypertension until his retirement in 1971. He was also at the helm of thoracic and cardiovascular surgery—an independent department with 60 beds and excellent facilities by contemporary standards. During the early years, his experimental ventures were enthusiastically supported by Dr. Lillehei and his associates and later by Dr. Rygg and his colleagues from Copenhagen. The early Polystan machine and the Rygg bag were tested at this centre. Basu carried out extensive research in unravelling the mysteries of liver diseases and tropical splenomegaly. In this pursuit he was associated with Dr. Amalananda Das, Dr. N.R. Konar, Dr. B.N. Aikat and later with the Johns Hopkins Hospital research wing and the Indian Council of Medical Research. His monograph on tropical splenomegaly was the fruit of his lifelong devotion in this sphere.

Professor Basu was a dedicated clinician and a gifted teacher who was uncompromising in his expectation of highest professional behaviour from his students and associates. His reputation as a surgeon attracted patients from far and wide but he never yielded to the lure of private practice at the cost of his principles. He held strong views and unhesitatingly delivered them when the necessity arose. He was formidable in his ideas but often more than generous in respecting reasoned opposition.

He had a burgeoning interest in the welfare of the surgical fraternity and his enthusiasm in this direction was widely acknowledged and respected. In 1954, he played a pioneering role in the formation and sustenance of the Thoracic Chapter of the Association of Surgeons of India of which he was the first Secretary. Later, he assumed the office of the President of this association during 1970–72. He had also served as President of the Indian Academy of Medical Sciences. He held the coveted posts of Chairman of the Governing Committee of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences and Dean of the Medical Faculty of the Calcutta University. He held memberships of the Scientific Advisory Board of the Indian Council of Medical Research; Council of the International Federation of Surgical Colleges and Editorial Board of the British Journal of Surgery. He was also a Governor of the American College of Surgeons from 1966–1976. In the course of his lifelong dedication to medical academics, he

produced 3 research monographs and authored nearly 200 research publications besides chapters in 8 books.

Professor Basu was a recipient of the prestigious Shanti Swaroop Bhatnagar and Dr. B.C. Roy Memorial Awards; the Coats Medal of Calcutta University; the Barclay Medal of the Asiatic Society and the Vishvensky Medal of the Soviet Union. He was a Visiting Professor at the Johns Hopkins University and the University of Edmonton. In 1981, the Banaras Hindu University conferred on him the honorary degree of Doctor of Science.

He retired from active service in 1971, but his services were recalled by the Government of West Bengal which appointed him as Vice-Chairman of the West Bengal State Planning Board for 3 years. Subsequently, he headed the Basu Committee to look into the teaching problems of the undergraduate colleges in West Bengal and submitted his report in record time. He continued as an honorary consultant to the South Eastern Railways and the Indian Army. He was also an honorary surgeon to the President of India.

Professor Ajit Kumar Basu passed away in December, 1986 leaving behind his wife, 2 sons and a host of admirers in the medical world.

*S. M. Sengupta*