

Prof. Ramendra Nath Chatterjee.

(1st Nov 1916-4th June 1984)

I have taken the biography of Prof. R. N. Chatterjee from the CME volume published by Prof. S. Kalyanaraman, Prof. Sunil Pandya et al. (1983). This covers the period upto 1983. Prof. R. N. Chatterjee's son, Dr. Abhijit Chatterjee, a successful neurologist himself has provided me some more information about his father.

Prof. Chatterjee won the prestigious Sir Ronald Ross Memorial Oration at the Institute of Postgraduate Education and Research in 1977, Fellowship of the State Medical Faculties in 1978, Coats Medal of the University of Calcutta in 1980.

He died of myocardial infarction on 4th June 1984. Prof. Asoke Bagchi had written a detailed obituary of his long time friend (Neurology India 1984-; 32: 1-2).

Prof. R. N. Chatterjee.

President, Neurological Society of India, 1961

Hailing from Bankura district, Dr. Chatterjee stood 10th in the Intermediate Science examination held by Calcutta University in 1935. At the urging of his father, Rai Saheb S. C. Chatterjee, he sought and obtained admission to the Calcutta Medical College the same year.

During his undergraduate period he found teaching in neuroanatomy and neurophysiology substandard. As questions on these subjects rarely appeared in the examination papers, the students too neglected them. A natural interest spurred Dr. Chatterjee to study the brain and spinal cord and fortunately for him, Professor A. K. Sen (anatomy) and Professor Mahalanobis (physiology) quizzed him on the nervous system in his practical examinations. Dr. Chatterjee recalls answering in great detail a query on the development of the insula. In the final M. B. B. S. too he fielded a question on ulnar nerve injury and feels that this performance won him the Gold Medal. Tennis, table tennis and basket ball claimed a fair share of his extracurricular tinnis. They did not, however, interfere with his bagging eight scholarships and prizes.

There was nothing by way of a department in neurology or neurosurgery. Some teachers were interested in disorders of the nervous system and taught them to the best of their abilities. Dr. Chatterjee particularly recalls Dr. J. C. Banerjee in the department of medicine. Lt. Col. F. J. Anderson, Professor of surgery, attempted excision of a pituitary tumour in 1941. Dr. Chatterjee was witness to the patient turn restless despite rectal avertin and the abandonment of the operation. Head injuries elicited standard therapy-50Vo glucose by intravenous injection and concentrated magnesium sulphate per rectum. During his entire undergraduate career there was no surgery for extradural or subdural hemorrhage. On opting for postgraduate education in surgery, the innate interest in the central nervous system prompted him to delve deeply. A relative in London presented him with a copy of Bancroft and Pilcher's Surgical Treatment of the Nervous System. Even as a house surgeon in 1946, Dr. Chatterjee was urging his chief Captain Frazer, to undertake surgery on a boy with Jacksonian fits. By 1949 Dr. Chatterjee was an independent surgeon at the P. G. Hospital and was already attracting patients with head injuries from other centres. His enthusiasm was contagious and in 1954 the then health minister in Calcutta suggested that Dr. Chatterjee go abroad for formal training in neurosurgery. Dr. Chatterjee countered with a request that a senior neurosurgeon from abroad be invited to Calcutta instead. So it was that Professor Herbert Kraus from Vienna came to the Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research, Calcutta in February 1955 for a year. In 1956 Dr. Chatterjee went to Vienna and continued his studies under Dr. Kraus. He also visited Professor Krayenbuhl in Zurich, Professor Tonnis in Koln, Professor Olivecrona in Stockholm and Professors Reichert and Hassler in Freiburg-im-Brisgau. As the guest of Professor Rottgen in Bonn, he was initiated into the joys of

wine-drinking. He rounded off his stay in Europe with visits to Professors LeBeau and Kleine in France and the Institute of Neurology at Queen Square. To enliven his return voyage on board S. S. Carthage, he found that he was the only surgeon around when a child developed acute appendicitis. Successful surgery on this patient ensured that the remaining ten days were spent attending to many other medical and surgical problems.

On returning to India, the local situation as regards neuro-sciences was in dismal contrast to what he'd just witnessed abroad. Neurology was substandard, neuroanatomy, neurophysiology, neuropathology and neuroradiology were almost non-existent. A promising young man was sent to the USA for training in neuropathology. He decided to stay on there. Gradually headway was made against odds.

The neurosurgery department formed by Dr. Chatterjee was initially scattered throughout the hospital with patients accommodated in various wards. The Xray units were in a separate building. Dr. Chatterjee deserves the credit for bringing the various facilities together in a separate 70 bedded hospital.

Dr. Chatterjee developed special interest in the treatment of hydrocephalus. In the pre-shunt years he practised coagulation of the choroid plexuses. He recalls patients where the ventricles were so large that on cutting into them the brain "would crumble into a small mass the size of a small orange". To prevent extracerebral haemorrhage Dr. Chatterjee would stitch the brain on either side of the incision (into it) to the dura as he'd been taught by Professor Tonnis. Dr. Chatterjee also practiced dilatation of the aqueduct when it was stenosed and developed a slit tube similar to a self-retaining catheter that could be retained by the aqueductal walls.

The department founded by Dr. Chatterjee was initially combined with that for neurology but later, differences in outlook and the need for smooth functioning occasioned a bifurcation. The neurology and neurosurgery sections had equal say as regards administration and finance.

When questioned about the present status of neuro-science in India, Dr. Chatterjee frankly confessed that apart from a few centres that have made good progress, most centres show woeful lack of equipment and personnel. It is difficult to attract the correct type of trainees to the neurological sciences. He especially points to paper work and obstruction by the bureaucrats as hindrances to development.

Dr. Chatterjee has passed the neurological torch he has wielded so well to his son Abhijit who is now the consultant neurologist at the Calcutta National College. Another son has chosen engineering as a profession. Dr. Chatterjee himself has long been an angler and now pursues his hobby of reading.

BIODATA OF DR. RAMENDRA NATH CHATTERJEE

Born on 27th April 1917 at Bankuru, West Bengal.

M. S. (Calcutta)

Junior Neurosurgeon : 1955-1957.

Assistant Professor of Neurosurgery IPCME & R. 1958-59.

Associate Professor of Neurosurgery, IPCME & R, 1960-64.

Professor and Head of the Department of Neurosurgery, IPCME & R, 1965-1974.

Head of the Department of Surgery, IPCME & R, 1972-1974.

Emeritus Professor of Neurosurgery, IPCME & R, 1975-1981.

At present Consultant Neurosurgeon, Calcutta Medical Research Institute.

Research Projects include :

- i) Suitability of hypothermia in Neurosurgery in intracranial vascular tumour and vascular malformations.
- ii) Collaborative epidemiological study on spontaneous subarachnoid haemorrhage in India.
- iii) Spinal vascular malformation.

Obtained several prizes and medals during undergraduate career including the Duke of Edinburgh Prize, Sir Frank Connor Memorial Prize, McLeod Cold Medal and Raj Soorjee Coomer Sarbhadikary Gold Medal. Examinee for MCh Neurosurgery at Calcutta and Madras. Helped to establish and develop the departments of Neurosurgery at the S. S. K. M. Hospital and Bangur Institute of Neurology. Presented a number of papers at national and international conferences. Delivered Sir Ronald Ross oration at the Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research, Calcutta, 1977. Awarded honorary fellowship of the state medical faculty, West Bengal. Awarded Coates Gold Medal by the University of Calcutta for notable contribution to Medical Science in 1979.

TEN IMPORTANT PUBLICATIONS BY DR. R. N. CHATTERJEE

1. Spinal vascular malformations and their treatment. Proceedings of the Australian Association of Neurologists and Proceedings of the Second Asian and Oceanian Congress of Neurology, Sydney, Australia, 5-1-1968.
2. Spinal vascular malformations-their classification, pathogenesis and the rationale of treatment by excision of the draining veins. Excerpta Medica International Congress series No. 193, Fourth International Congress of Neurological Surgery, New York, U. S. A.
3. Beitrag zur Diagnostik und Therapie der puerperalen Thrombose der Sinus sagittalis superior, Acta Neurochirurgica, 6 1-2, 1958.
4. Spinal Cord Tumour. Indian Journal of Surgery, 25, II. 1963.
5. Suitability of hypothermia in intracranial operations. Journal of Experimental Medical Sciences, India, 7, I and 2, 1963.
6. Neurological complications of influenza. Neurology, 7, 1, 1959.
7. Neurological complications of influenza (A toxic manifestation) Neurology India, 2. Suppl 3, 451-453, 1963.
8. An analysis of 360 cases of head injuries. Bulletin of Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research, 2, 2, 1965.
9. Post traumatic amnesia, A clinical study. Neurology (India) 15, 24-5, 1967.
10. Pseudotumour cerebri group of diseases. Neurology (India), 15, 185-189, 1967.