

OBITUARY**PROFESSOR SAROJ MEHTA**

The tragedy of life is not death, but what we let die inside of us, while we live. In this sense, Prof Saroj Mehta – an incredible personality, lived an incredible life, enriched not only by an outstanding career but a wonderful family, having impeccably raised three children and seven grandchildren, besides being a pillar of support to her husband. I came in contact with her, first as a child (she was my mother's exalted senior from Lady Hardinge), as a patient, then as a MD Paediatrics student and finally as a Paediatric Gastroenterologist. Prof. Mehta like allmortals, went through her share of triumphs as well as trials and tribulations; she had a few staunch admirers in a sea of adversaries. And amongst her ardent admirers were her students as well as her young patients – even her worst detractors would now in retrospect, admit to a sense of awe towards her. The practice of Paediatrics was her calling; she was a natural with children; she had an unparalleled almost intuitive clinical skill which shone even more because of her uncanny grasp of not only the medical, but also the social problems of her young charges. She was a superlative teacher of her times. To say the least, she not only held hands of her students but also opened their minds and touched their hearts. Students used to strive with each other to exchange their duties to enable them to attend her Tuesday afternoon bedside classes, which were a high point of their week – a treasure in terms of learning and meticulous approach to their patients.

She graduated at the top of her Medical College class in Lady Hardinge Medical College, New Delhi, completing her MD in Pediatrics from AIIMS, New Delhi. She joined PGIMER in August 1964 after training at Cornell University in USA with the ambition of serving the poor, teaching young doctors and conducting research. Her research in malnutrition brought her worldwide acclaim, having published over 250 scientific papers and chapters in books.

She was the undisputed doyenne of the vital speciality of Paediatric Gastroenterology & Hepatology in India, having branched off from General Paediatrics to set up the very first Department Of Paediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition in PGIMER in the mid eighties. The first Paediatric Endoscopies in the country were performed under her tutelage. The first academic society of the speciality was also simultaneously started with her as one of the three founding members (Prof S Mehta, Prof SK Mittal and Prof Shankaranarayan).

Dr. Saroj Mehta, MD, passed away peacefully on December 26, 2016 surrounded by her loving family in Louisville, Kentucky, USA. She was truly an inspiration, a regal and graceful persona, fearless in her convictions – a much admired person. May her soul rest in peace and may the Almighty give her family the strength to bear her irreparable loss, whilst celebrating her fulfilled life. As they say: "Neither fire nor wind, birth nor death nor venomous tongues can erase your good deeds"; So dear Ma'am you won't go away; you will walk beside us everyday, unseen, unheard; still missed, still loved and very dear!! Amen.