

# AIIMS DIAMOND JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS

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## THE JOURNEYS OF AIIMSONIANS



By

*V. Srinivas*

Deputy Director Administration

AIIMS, New Delhi

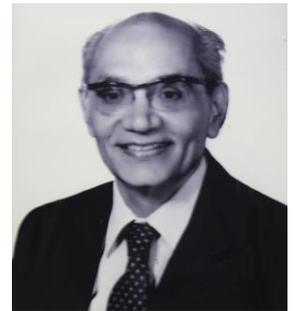
# THE JOURNEYS OF AIIMSONIANS

## ABSTRACT

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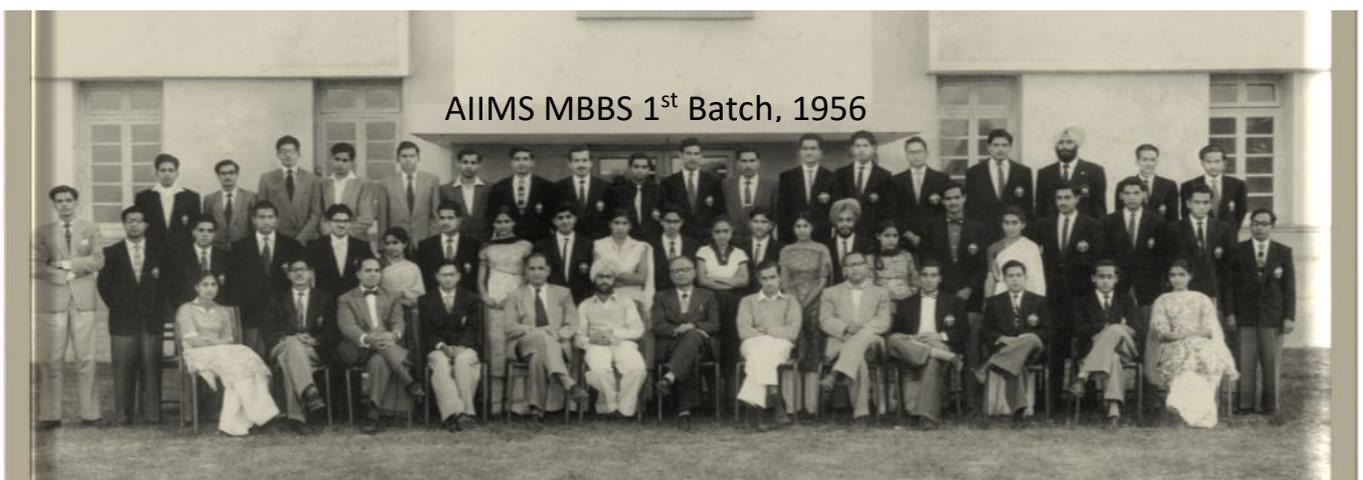
While it is widely acknowledged that AIIMS is India's apex Medical Sciences University, celebrating its Diamond Jubilee on September 25, 2016, the JOURNEYS OF AIIMSONIANS who collectively constitute the greatest pool of medical excellence of the Nation, are a fascinating subject of study. For these extra-ordinary men and women who undergo their education at the Institute and serve till retirement at 65, it is a very long journey marked by seriousness of purpose, a deep sense of commitment, willingness to work in complex areas of medical education, patient care and research. The Senior Faculty of AIIMS have, by their mercurial brilliance earned high respect for the Institute and individually attained a leadership role as flag-bearers of excellence both in India and abroad.

The AIIMSONIANS are unique individuals because they have set out to do something significant, work on important problems, have the courage to pursue independent thoughts, are high achievers at a young age, have a tremendous drive, are willing to work longer hours than contemporaries with equal ability, have high emotional commitment to their profession and have the capacity to present their achievements to the world. I have asked 5 of them if it was worth it? For they had an option to serve in many other Institutions of the country and abroad, and the common refrain has been that "It was worth it". The highest national recognitions have been bestowed on several AIIMSONIANS, with being Dr. V. Ramalingaswamy felicitated 3 times with Padma Awards including the Padma Vibhushan.



Dr. V. Ramalingaswamy

The AIIMSONIANS toil long hours in operation theaters, clinical work, research Laboratories and Classroom Teaching. Roughly 40 percent of their time is devoted to patient care, 40 percent to research work and 20 percent to teaching. The Institute provides the flexibility to devote a higher amount of time to any of the trinity of goals of Medical Education, Research and Patient Care to best achieve their end objectives. That AIIMS stands at the apex of the Medical Universities in India for several years now, is a tribute to the exacting standards the AIIMSONIANS have set for themselves.



## High Achievers at a Young Age

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The AIIMSONIANS journey usually begins as an MBBS student at the age of 17 or 18. They are young, intense, scholarly and represent the highest meritocracy. They complete the MBBS in 4 ½ years followed by a year of internship. This

period is marked by an attachment with Community Health Center Ballabgarh and PHC's Dayalpur/ Chainnsa their first exposure to actual direct patient care after years of didactic and clinical teaching sessions. They hold pleasant memories of the first phase of their lives where they graduated after being intensely competitive. There are several doctors who join AIIMS as Junior Residents, Senior Residents and as Faculty who also become part of AIIMSONIANS.

Prof Balram Airan, Chief of the CT Center, the senior-most AIIMSONIAN currently serving in AIIMS, was part of the team of cardiac surgeons that conducted India's first heart transplant in 1994. Prof Balram joined the Institute in 1970 aged 18. Prof Vinod Paul, the Head of Department of Pediatrics joined the Institute in 1972 aged 17. Prof Peush Sahni, the Head of Gastro Intestinal Surgery joined the Institute in 1976 aged 18. Prof Nikhil Tandon, the Head of Department of Endocrinology joined the Institute in 1981 aged 17. Prof Sandeep Agarwal, Professor in the Department of Pediatric Surgery joined AIIMS in 1981 aged 18. They came straight from High Schools to the most intense medical institution of India.

They needed support to cope with the transition, which AIIMS provided them. The faculty student relationship was quite open. Students have been the Nerve Center of the Institute Universe. They had a local guardian from faculty to look after them in the initial years AIIMS had become their second home.

The graduation is followed by admission to the MD or MS programs in medical or surgical disciplines and 3 years of work as Junior Residents. There is also an option of a 5 year MCH course. This is followed by selection of a professional discipline for the DM or MCH program. It is only after 11 years of intensive study do the AIIMSONIANS reach the faculty appointment as Assistant Professor. Their choice of selection of disciplines at the MD and MS stage and then at DM/ MCH stage are often based on their areas of interest in which they would like to dedicate their careers. The prevalent view in AIIMS is that surgeons are more doers and physicians are more intellectually curious.

Prof Balram was inspired by Prof Gopinath to take cardiac surgery. Prof Paul was inspired by Prof O.P. Ghai for joining Pediatrics. Prof Peush Sahni inspired by Prof Samiran Nandy joined the GI unit when it started surgical procedures. Prof Nikhil Tandon chose to be a physician instead of a surgeon and endocrinology satiated his curiosity for laboratory work. Prof Sandeep Agarwala chose Pediatric Surgery because of his emotional commitment to pediatrics and surgery.



1<sup>st</sup> Convocation, 1963

## Work on Important Problems

High recognition comes from taking huge responsibility. The AIIMSONIANS work amidst a high meritocracy and a strong peer group pressure. Younger colleagues are encouraged to challenge and question. There is the opportunity of establishing state of the art laboratories and pursue research questions. The Physicians pursue largely clinical research, translational research, public health and district based models in collaboration with State Governments, Government of India Institutions like Department of Biotechnology, Indian Council of Medical Research, the International Organizations like the World Health Organization and the UNICEF.

If its an important Medical Problem, one can be sure that there is an AIIMSONIAN working on it in AIIMS – such is their fierce motivation and emotional commitment to the societal cause. They are highly driven individuals, each one of them, and AIIMS provides them with the academic freedom for their creativity to blossom.

## Work Longer Hours than contemporaries

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The work hours in AIIMS are far longer than what are seen in most Government Institutions. Genius is 99 percent perspiration and 1 percent inspiration. The AIIMSONIANS are willing to work long hours intelligently and with a seriousness of purpose. There is tremendous emotional commitment and passion to enable AIIMS continue on a path of excellence.

In my years at the International Monetary Fund, I did see economists and monetary policy specialists who were highly motivated, committed and driven but econometric analysis and monetary policy seems far different from saving lives. AIIMS represents Indian society, its varying sections, each one of them coming for health care, and each one of them finding a panacea. There is no comparable representative institute in India.

Prof Balram’s passion for long work hours hasn’t come down even after 45 years of joining AIIMS. Prof Peush said he has a passion to return to the alma matter the enormous amount of learning that he attained in the Institute. Prof Paul said translational research keep him motivated. Prof Nikhil felt there was enough excitement to keep him going at high pace even after 35 years at the AIIMS. Prof Sandeep said his dream is to contribute to pediatric surgical services in India given the chronic shortages.

## Presenting their Achievements to the World

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An AIIMS faculty attends a minimum of one international seminar outside South Asia and 4 seminars in South Asia. They get 40 days of conference travel to present their work in National and International Fora. AIIMS has a number of collaborations with major global institutes where frequent exchanges and joint research work is pursued. The AIIMSONIANS write papers by the hundreds, address global community in conferences, conduct workshops and head research teams.

Prof Paul has worked with WHO and UNICEF on advocacy for neonatal health. Prof Nikhil has been a part of a complex narrative of global efforts to fight diabetes. Prof Sandeep has represented AIIMS at the World Congress of Pediatric Surgeons, the American Congress of Pediatric Surgeons and the European Congress of Pediatric Surgery. Despite their presence at the global high table of medicine, they are simple men, sharing the empathy of India’s poorest of poor.

## Conclusion

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An AIIMSONIAN’s journey in AIIMS is roughly 45 years. From student years to retirement, the journey is one of high accomplishment, high visibility and high meritocracy. The traits described above makes them AIIMSONIANS. Their collective positive energy makes AIIMS, India’s apex Medical Sciences University.

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*\*Author is a senior civil servant, an IAS officer of 1989 batch  
presently serving as Deputy Director Administration, AIIMS New Delhi.  
The views expressed in the Article are his personal.*