

**Padma Bhushan Prof. Jacob Chandy**  
**The Founder President of Neurological Society of India**

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"Some are born great, some attain greatness by their effort and for some greatness is thrust upon them". Prof. Jacob Chandy (J.C) belongs to the second category.

I deem it a privilege to pen the biography of my teacher, philosopher, guide and friend. Forgetting Prof. Jacob Chandy, would mean forgetting the development of Neurosciences in India and particularly the very beginnings of N.S.I. Tall, dark, rough looking and rough voiced giving a different impression at first sight, Prof. Jacob Chandy is a perfect person with a loving heart. As an artistic surgeon he was a Leonardo Da Vinci, as an administrator he was a Bismarck, an avid planner and organiser as Winston Churchill, an erudite teacher as Nagarjuna, as devout as John the Baptist and a visionary as Asoka. Rare combinations indeed!

Now let me look into the details of the history in the life of Prof. Jacob Chandy.

J. C. was born in an orthodox Christian family, father a presbyter of Anglican church and mother a house wife. In 1910, they were living in the rural areas near Kottayam. These places in those days medical care was well nigh impossible. At 7th year of J. C's age his mother suddenly took ill and died, obviously without getting any medical help. This event made a sharp dent in the mind of young J. C. which gave him the impetus to take to medicine, with the sole purpose of improving health care system in the villages. J. C. did thrive under the grand mother's care and later under the care of Ammachi, J. C's Aunt who lived for 102 years.

J. C. had his school education at Mavelikkara and the college studies at C. M. S. College, Kottayam. All along the religious background was maintained. As Secretary of Student Christian Movement he led a delegation to S.C.M. Conference at Tambaram in 1927. J. C. also participated in Evangelical tours. All these experiences moulded J. C. and the ardour to become a missionary doctor to serve in the rural areas became finite. After completing the college course of 2 years J. C. very much wanted to pursue medical education. With the background of Student Christian Movement, and the offer of a scholarship, J. C. met Lt Col Dr. Humphrey an I.M.S. officer, Principal of Madras Medical College'

J. C. got admission to the medical course.

J. C. found it difficult to forget the imperialistic and patronising attitudes of Britishers. A flame got kindled in him about National Pride, which made him come back to India and start work at C.M.C. Vellore.

After completing the medical course J. C. worked as a house surgeon in General Hospital, Madras under the famous E.N.T. specialist Dr. P. V. Cherian. Then on J. C's contact with C.M.C Vellore progressed. Meanwhile the political situation in India was heating up with Indian National Congress. But Madras saw less of activity. J. C. was interested in music and did sing in choirs, Sunday school and involved in church activities. This did give J. C an immense increase in faith in God, which was there as an inborn right from childhood. His "deep throated" voice was particularly appreciated by choirs.

Mahatmaji during his visit to Travancore visited Kottayam also and this made an indelible impression in the J. C's mind especially for independent India. J. C's missionary zeal prevented him from joining the government service or military service. But J. C wanted to take post- graduate training. So he joined M. M. C and had six months of surgical training and then was posted to Stanley Medical College under Dr. Krishnaswamy, and here he worked with him for one year. The meager income was frustrating.

Meanwhile aiming for a good placement in a missionary hospital J. C applied to a few centres. J. C got the opportunity soon and that was a doctor's job with Aramco company hospital in Bahrain. Salary was good but there was no job satisfaction. While in Bahrain J. C had chances to go to the mainland and meet different people. The contract period with Aramco was for one year. At the end of that year J. C left the job. Reformed Church of America had a mission Hospital in Bahrain and Dr. Paul Harrison was in charge. J. C went to this hospital and found that Dr. Paul Harrison (PH)

was away on furlough. But he met Dr. Strom who was holding the fort. This area was under British rule and the administrator was a Political Agent. Dr. J. C met Dr. Strom and they became friends. Dr. Strom had to leave suddenly and the hospital had to be looked after. Thus Dr. J. C had to start work there and was in charge of hospital administration. Dr. PH came back shortly and accepted J. C as his colleague. Dr. PH was a Bible scholar. Dr. J. C with his Biblical and Missionary spirit could complement the interests of Dr. PH. Thus birds of the same feather enjoyed working together. Dr. PH became J. C's friend, philosopher and guide.

Experience in the Bahrain was plenty, and J. C came home and married Thangam on 4th September 1941. After the wedding the young couple went together to Bahrain and PH gave them a warm welcome.

An incident occurred during this period is worth mentioning. While Dr. PH was away the British Political Agent and a few respectable Arabs came to the mission hospital. The Arabs were introduced as the sons and relatives of the Ruler of Qatar. Dr. J. C was informed that during the Ruler's hunting trips, the Sheikh had become unconscious and they demanded medical help. As Dr. PH was away it became incumbent on Dr. J. C to do what was necessary in the matter. J. C was afraid that the ruler and his kinsmen could even kill him if anything untoward happened to the Sheikh. With assurances from the British Political Agent Dr. J. C accompanied by Thangam along with helpers and medical supplies pro-

ceeded to see the Sheikh in the desert. In about four to five hours travelling they reached desert. In the distance the tents, camels and some green shrubs were seen. It was in this oasis like place the Sheikh was lying unconscious in a tent on a lushly carpeted floor. He was surrounded by many men and women in Burkha. Sheikh's eldest son knew some English and Dr. J. C requested him to clear the tent of all relatives. As soon as J. C neared the patient the unmistakable odour of diabetic ketoacidosis prompted the diagnosis. Immediately an IV line was started. The Sheikh's urine was loaded with acetone. With insulin and electrolytes Dr. J. C spent the night with the patient: J. C could nab some fruits and coffee. Gradually by next evening the patient recovered his consciousness. As the Sheikh opened his eyes he saw Dr. J. C and started talking to his son. The Sheikh took hold of Dr. J. C's hand and kissed it. Then followed the

stranger ritual of every kinsman falling at Dr. J. C's feet and kissing it. It was their custom. Everyone was overjoyed. After a traditional parting dinner Dr. J. C was given a band of 20 men and 20 women slaves as a gift! For J. C, feeding him self and his wife was a problem with the marginal income. How to feed the 40 slaves? J. C said he would grant them freedom But all the slaves decided not to have freedom but to remain with the Sheikh so that there would be no food problem for them'

Later J. C thought "why not take all the forty slaves and sell them for huge amount of money? But the missionary spirit prevailed and he and Thangam came back to the mission hospital with all the goodwill from the Sheikh.

One day Dr. J. C expressed to Dr. PH his desire to work in India' Dr. PH wanted J. C to do some post graduate course in U.S for which the latter strove to get a[ opening. Dr. PH managed a position, got the money for tuition fee and fare for the passage. Meanwhile Mrs. J. C was pregnant and little Mathew was born on 29th December 1943. With a farewell meeting, Dr. J. C left Bahrain and reached Bombay by boat along with Thangam and little Mathew. Leaving the family at Kottayam, Dr. J.C managed to get a booking in a troop ship which was going transpacific to west coast of U. S. with the second world war on, amidst fears of Torpedo attacks or Japanese bomber attacks, the troop ship finally on the 43rd day reached St. Pedro Los Angeles, California' Dr. J. C maintained his contact with Dr' PH' Dr. J. C did his surgical course. At that period Dr. Chone's Oliver, Christian Medical Association Secretary from India visited J. C and exhorted him to join C' M' C Vellore after the studies in U. S. In fact Dr. PH also wanted J. C to join C. M. C Vellore. Dr. J. C was able to make a good impression at University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; and did some research work on CNS also. Then came the opportunity to do Neurosurgical training at Montreal under Wilder Penfield. with the background work under Dr. Rhoads at Philadelphia Dr. J. C's application was considered favourably and J. C went over to Montreal in October 1945, with Masters degree in surgery (M. Sc). Two years were spent at M. N. I (Montreal Neurological Institute). As a resident he was given the accommodation and "everything found, First six months J. C worked with Dr. Francis Mc Naughton in clinical Neurology and Neuro anatomy. Later he was posted with Will.

iam Cone for Neurosurgery. Dr. Penfield was concentrating on epilepsy work and the tenure with William Cone in general Neurosurgery proved very beneficial.

In 1946 Dr. Robert Cochrane, Principal of C. M. C. Vellore visited J. C at Montreal. Even through Vellore had no facilities for doing Neurosurgery, he also kindled J. C's interest to join C. M. C. He also promised financial help if needed. Dr. Cone insisted on daily routine patient care, laboratory works especially E. E. G and "Library" hours. With such preparations J. C appeared for FRCS-Canada and passed the exam with flying colours.

Dr. Cone and Dr. Penfield congratulated J. C and he continued to work with Dr. Cone for another year as his chief resident. Later J. C joined Dr. Rasmussen and learnt setting up of a new department at Chicago. 1948 was thus a momentous year and Dr. J. C was awarded FACS also. His contact with Liza and Rev. Sanjeev Savarirayan and further discussions proved fruitful and the view of C. M. C. got brightened. Dr. Hilda Lazarus the then Principal of C. M. C. visited Chicago and had fruitful talks. But lack of funds for setting up a new department at C. M.C. loomed large as a spectre. Just as J. C. was pondering over this in his office, Dr. Paul Harrison entered and gave him two cheques worth 13000 U. S. D. and told J. C to buy necessary equipments and start the Department of Neurology at Vellore!

So, Dr. PH. the friend, philosopher, guide and mentor scored again. Even today there is a special examination held at the department of Neuro-sciences at C. M. C Vellore and the winner is given the Paul Harrison prize

Dr. J. C got the necessary equipments, and an EEG machine and shipped them to C.M.C, He left for India and joined C.M.C in January 1949. The entire staff of C.M.C were overjoyed to receive Dr. J. C into their fold.

All luggage was cleared and brought to C.M.C. Then C.M.C hospital had 360 beds which were increased to 500 beds, with Dr. Lazarus as Director and Principal.

In those days Dr. Kutumbaiah was the Chief Physician. He later became the Principal. "Brain Tumours" are "rare" said Dr. Kutumbaiah,

and only Syphilis of CNS was common. So J. C would take rounds in the wards and could pick out cases with papilloedema and diagnose the tumour and operate. Thus started the Department of Neurology and Neurosurgery at C.M.C, Vellore, with just 10 beds spread in the various wings of the hospital. In spite of pressure on J. C to do general surgery he stuck to neurosurgery only, even though it was unpalatable to some higher ups in the C.M.C. Dr. Issiah joined as the first assistant.

Similarly it was Dr. H. S. Bhat who helped J. C as his resident. (Later Dr. Bhat became Professor General Surgery and started the department of Genito urinary surgery). In January 1950 Dr. Baldev Singh came and met Dr. J. C and showed his fascination for Neurology. Dr. Baldev Singh joined Dr. J. C as the Neurologist.

Alongside Dr. J. C worked as Treasurer of the institution. Lots of teething troubles, differences with the administration etc. had to be overcome. Dr. J. C was also partly responsible for the revision of the constitution of the council which was formed in 1954. Dr. J. C was also partly responsible for the revision of the constitution of the council which was formed in 1954. Dr. Baldev Singh was sent to U.S.A for EEG training Dr. B. K. Bachawat joined as Neurochemist in 1952. With great will and support the department prospered and a new block N. Ward came into existence. This block was opened by the then Health Minister, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur in 1954.

In Feb. 1950 J. C's were blessed with another son, Varghese and two years later a baby girl also, Accamma.

The department of Neurology and Neurosurgery prospered and W. Penfeld visited the institution and opened the next block of the Department. J. C. could start P.G training in Neurosurgery for the first time in CMC Vellore and persons like Dr. Gajendrasinh, Dr. Dharkar, Dr. Mahendra Singh got trained.

The M. S. Neuro Surgery programme was started in 1956 as also D. M. Neurology in 1958. So many have passed through the portals of C.M.C with adequate training and got M. D., MCh and DM degrees. After 1966 the MS (Neuro) was changed to M.Ch. (Neuro). The Neurochemistry department also flourished and to the credit of Dr. Bachawat many

Ph. D's followed. Candidates passing through C'M.C have established neuro-science departments at various parts of India. Dr. J. C had

occasion to go to various places as a consultant to treat VIP's. I don't want to put their names as it would be too long. In 1963 Dr. Rajendra Prasad visited C.M.C twice and for 1964 January Republic Day J. C's were invited as special guests, and they spent one week in Rashtrapathy Bhavan. In May 1964, J.C was honoured with Padma Bhushan. S. Radhakrishnan invested J. C. with Padma Bhushan. J. C became Principal of C.M.C also that year. He was also involved in the formation of National Academy of Medical Sciences and Association for the Advancement of Medical Education. He also got actively involved in the I. C. M.R, WHO and many other organisations.

Dr. J. C also was very much in the picture to start the department of Neurosurgery and Neurology at A.I.I.M.S.

Dr. Sushila Nayyar the then Health Minister lost her brother following an accident. Dr. J. C later on went to her office to offer condolences. Then followed a discussion which ended in the formation of the Neuro Department in AIIMS and before long Dr. P. N. Tandon was appointed Professor of Neurosurgery.

All these years from 1950 with Prof. B. Ramamurthy starting the department of Neurosurgery at Madras Medical College, there had been a healthy competitive spirit between the two departments.

In 1956 the Neurological society of India was born with Prof. J. C as its founder President and Prof. B. R. M. as its founder Secretary other members being Dr. Baldev Singh and Dr. Narasimhan. The foursome forged the society and today it has become a strong society with over 1400 members.

In 1960 J. C was elected member of Indian Academy of Sciences. Several times J. C had occasion to go to Military Hospitals and do surgery and he became a consultant to Armed Forces. J. C was invited to give orations and memorial lectures including "sardar Vallabhai Patel memorial lecture" In 1965 J. C visited U. S. S. R. at their invitation. J. C also participated in many international meetings. Fame of C.M.C department of neuroscience spread again due to the papers published by his trainees who later on became chiefs like Prof. K. V. Mathai, Prof. Jacob Abraham, Prof. G. M. Taory and Dr. J. C. Jacob.

In 1970 Dr. J. C, retired from C.M.C services and settled down in home town Kottayam. But he was not tired at all. He became Emeritus Prof. of Neurosurgery for the Medical Colleges of Kerala. He continued teaching. Dr. J. C had a pet programme of starting a course- "BSc" Health Sciences. A detailed curriculum was drawn up and progress was not possible due to the dogmatic approach of some University higher ups. Yet Andhra University did start this course. J. C actively involved himself in the church activities and has been the guiding spirit of Kottayam diocese.

First son, Dr. Mathew Chandy accomplished himself well in studies and became a neurosurgeon. He also adorned the seat which his father did as Professor and Chief of the Department of Neurological Sciences at C.M.C. Now he is working at Khoula Hospital, Muscat.

Second son Varghese is a chemical engineer in Australia.

Accamma got married to a Business Executive and is happy at Hyderabad.

The pinnacle of his fame was acknowledged by the World Federation of Neurosurgical societies when they presented the medal of honour at the World Congress which was held at New Delhi in 1989.

Dr. J. C diagnosed to have a carcinoma prostate 20 years ago has had treatment with hormones. With God's grace fully on him he continues to live a happy strong willed life. A mild stroke involving the left side has completely cleared. Again recently an obstructive uropathy was treated with laser surgery and J. C continues to go on his 88th year.

In the history of C.M.C hospital Vellore, J. C has made indelible impressions in every field, be it microbiology or Anatomy to Engineering department. Systematic selection of doctors and their training has made it possible for the

various departments to flourish. Mentioning names here would be unnecessary. A visionary he was, he did shape second and third line of successors, so that his absence was never felt and all the training programmes did go on.

J. C has fought against all odds. J. C's firm faith has sustained him all these years. At the peak of his career as Principal of C.M.C he commanded respect. His presence in the institution could be felt. As a trainee doing Neurosurgery in 1964-66 I can vouch to the fact that the first impression of J. C was awe which gave way to respect and affection as time passed. He has been a loadstone, a trail blazer, and a path maker.

I take this opportunity to pray God Almighty to give him many more years of happy and healthy life.

I am sure J. C must be extremely proud over the fact that the specialty of Neuro-sciences has advanced today so much, that the sapling he planted and nurtured has grown into a big tree and the grand children looked after the big tree.

To quote the Bible "I shall show you the way. You will have to walk it. Nobody else can walk for you". And J. C continues to walk the path shown by Him.

**Editor's note:**

Dr. Sambasivan did his MS Neurosurgery under Prof. Jacob Chandy in C.M.C Vellore. He is still very close to Prof. Chandy. When I requested Prof. Chandy to write his autobiographical paper for this publication he asked me to go to his house so that he could give me the necessary details to write his biography. I was scheduled to go to USA for a holiday and hence I could not do it. Instead Prof. Sambasivan wrote Prof. Chandy's biography, a real tribute to his respected teacher.

Prof. Jacob Chandy has already published his autobiography entitled 'Reminiscences and Reflections' : The story of the Development of the Christian Medical College and Hospital, Vellore Kottayam. 1988. That publication gives a lot of information about him and the Christian Medical Mission's work in Vellore and is a valuable publication thus.

In this connection, I may mention another pioneer neurosurgeon who was Prof. Jacob Chandy's protege. Dr. Narayanan Namboothiripad (NNS 3 of the Neurological Society of India) belonged to an orthodox Namboothiri sect but later got converted as a Christian. He wanted to get trained in neurosurgery and was helped by Prof. Jacob Chandy. He passed his FRCS from UK and worked in Edinburgh and C.M.C Vellore (1960-1962). Later he became the Professor of Neurosurgery at C.M.C Hospital, Ludhiana for nearly 11 years. After his retirement from Ludhiana, he served at Calicut PVS Hospital and later at Medical Mission Hospital, Tiruvella. He died on 23 Dec 1995. Dr. Namboothiripad was very quiet and was a pioneer neurosurgeon in Punjab. I take this opportunity to pay homage to him also.

K. Rajasekharan Nair.