

Obituary

Professor (Dr.) Rachel Mathai (1929-2021) - A tribute

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Received: 23 November 2021
Accepted: 23 November 2021
EPub Ahead of Print: 17 December 2021
Published: 09 April 2022

DOI
[10.25259/JSSTD_80_2021](https://doi.org/10.25259/JSSTD_80_2021)

Quick Response Code:



Figure 1: Dr. Rachel Mathai (1929–2021).

Dr. Rachel Mathai, Professor and former Head of the department of dermatology, Christian medical college (CMC), Vellore passed away on October 6, 2021 [Figure 1]. A legend in the field of dermatology, she left for her heavenly abode, after decades of dedicated service to the humanity. Her ground breaking work gave new hope and redemption to many who would otherwise have been bound to a life of pain and frustration.

Dr. Rachel Mathai was born in 1929 as the daughter of Judge Jacob Eapen in Kerala. She joined CMC, Vellore in 1947 for undergraduate medical education, when this was not considered as a good career choice for women. In 1957, Dr. Rachel Mathai joined the dermatology department at CMC, Vellore [Figure 2]. She acquired 'the Membership of the Royal College of Physicians (MRCP)' from the United Kingdom. She later became a 'Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians.'

To be a specialist teacher in dermatology, she decided to do Diploma in dermatology at Madras Medical College, under the great visionary, Prof. Dr. A.S Thambiah. Dr. Rachel Mathai started post-graduate course in dermatology in CMC, Vellore in 1979 and guided its destiny till she called it a day in 1989. Under her leadership (1976–1989), the department of dermatology at CMC, Vellore grew rapidly, training five post-graduates per year and providing quality care to the afflicted.



Figure 2: Dr. Rachel Mathai: Early years.

Dr. Rachel Mathai worked from 7 a.m. every day, putting in long hours for her students and colleagues in order to prepare them to be competent clinicians and teachers. She served as a personal advisor, mentor, and guide to post-graduate students. Those who were trained by her carry on the spirit of service and enlightenment in different regions of the world.

Dr. Rachel Mathai was known and recognized for pioneering research, in dermatology and allied subjects. She was equally adept as a skillful teacher and was a store house of knowledge. Her boundless knowledge in Dermatology, Leprosy, and Sexually Transmitted Diseases was widely accepted and she was an erudite scholar with several publications to her credit. She was a regular faculty member for continuing medical education programs and conferences and was always willing to share her knowledge with students and colleagues.

She was also instrumental in the development of the famous Schieffelin Leprosy Research and Training Centre, Karigiri which is a sister concern of CMC, Vellore. She was the editor of the Indian Journal of Dermatology, Venereology, and Leprology [Figure 3], the official publication of Indian Association of Dermatologists, Venereologists and Leprologists (IADVL) for several years from 1977. In the era before electronic mails and digital devices, receiving articles and reviewing, editing, and publishing them was a herculean task. Her dedicated work drew acclaim from the whole

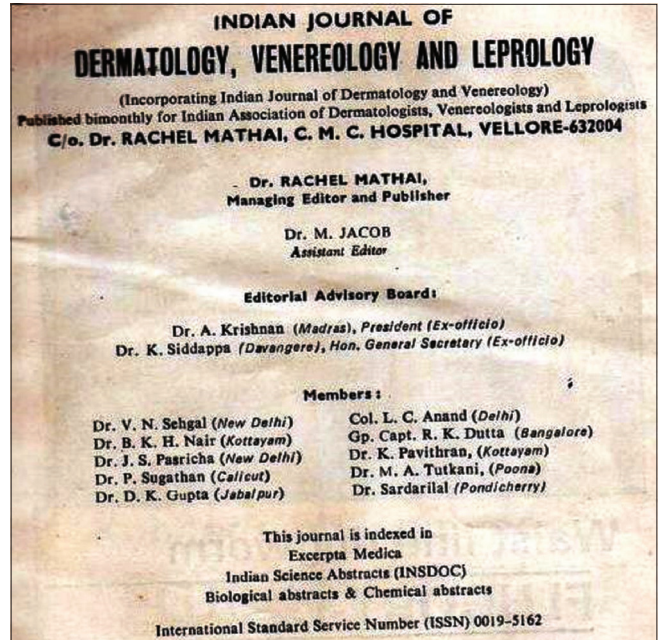


Figure 3: Journal masthead of IJDVL, May-June issue, 1983 (Image courtesy - Indian Journal of Dermatology, Venereology and Leprology).

dermatology community. IADVL will always be in debt to this great person for her invaluable service to the journal and the association in its early days.

She has won several accolades for her invaluable contribution to dermatology in India which included the Ambady Oration and the IADVL Life Time Achievement Award. In 2013, The IADVL, Tamil Nadu Branch instituted Dr. Rachel Mathai Oration.

She was married to Prof. (Dr) KV Mathai, one of the pioneers in modern neurosurgery in India, who was also instrumental in the growth of the department of neurosurgery at CMC, Vellore. They have two children – Dr. Varughese Mathai and Susan Mathai, who are worthy successors of great parents.

Dr. Rachel Mathai's death has left behind a void, but her legacy will go on to inspire future generations. May her soul rest in peace.

How to cite this article: Thomas J. Professor (Dr.) Rachel Mathai (1929-2021) - A tribute. *J Skin Sex Transm Dis* 2022;4:87-8.