

# CASE STUDY 1



*The thinking of a person gains in breadth,  
the concepts become clear, and the boundaries of  
narrow thinking and criticism of others,  
can be overcome.*

**- Dr. Suresh Tandon**

**DR. SURESH TANDON** is a very senior Physiology professor in a private medical college in Uttar Pradesh (UP). His words reflect his wisdom and knowledge of his subject beyond the theoretical perspectives. He quotes freely from Sanskrit literature and truly personifies a teacher in all forms. He has retired from teaching in a government college, but is still working as a professor.

Dr. Tandon hails from an illustrious family from one of the large cities of Uttar Pradesh. His grandfather was a civil surgeon<sup>1</sup>, his father a proprietor, and his mother a teacher. Dr Tandon was a teacher before he chose to enter the medical field. He completed his medical graduation from UP in 1968. He got married after his parents died quite early. He completed his post graduate studies in Physiology in 1972 and joined as a lecturer in a college in Meerut the next year. Currently, he lives in Meerut, UP with his wife.

## **PRE-MIGRATION**

Dr. Tandon was satisfied with his job as a lecturer; his lectures were practical and well received by the students. However, as the years went by, he began to feel that the management was not appreciative. He had worked for 7 to 8 years without any promotion. Apart from teaching, Dr Tandon had a keen interest in research, specially in the area of chrono-biology. The college had meagre facilities for this area of study, thus adding to his frustration. At that time, Germany was leading the research in this field and Dr. Tandon was invited to present a paper at a college there. Dr. Tandon found the process of going to Germany fraught with hurdles and disappointments. He was denied government assistance. The clerks who were processing his papers asked for favours. Dr. Tandon said it was unfortunate that, instead of acknowledging that an Indian doctor was receiving such recognition from Germany, the government seemed to want to penalize him for this honour. During his visit to Germany he met an internationally respected professor and a stalwart in this field who invited him to join his work in the US; however, he had no intentions of working in the US at that moment, so Dr. Tandon declined the prestigious offer.

Later Dr. Tandon received another offer to join a research project in a University in Germany. As recognition for this work, he was awarded the Humboldt Fellowship in 1981. The university in Germany requested him to get the Indian government's

permission and move to Germany. However, he experienced the same hurdles with the government departments. The corrupt clerks again asked for favours and the government department raised questions about his earlier trip to Germany, which was a self funded trip. Boggled down by such depressing events, Dr. Tandon refused the offer, even though he knew this scope of research was not available in Indi, at the time.

Dr. Tandon felt very frustrated and unhappy with the circumstances, but his passion for teaching kept him going. It was at that time that a friend offered him a teaching post in Libya. Initially he was hesitant as his children were very young and in school. However, he felt that 'survival was difficult' for him in India. He finally concluded that with no house, little savings, and increased responsibilities towards his family, this was a timely opportunity and he chose to accept the offer. He applied to the Indian government for permission but did not receive any communication even after 3 months. Thereafter, Dr. Tandon informed the department of his decision and intimated them of his working address in Libya. Preparation and documentation for going to Libya was then done by himself. He left the country in March 1981, accompanied by his wife.

### **MIGRATION**

Dr. Tandon became a lecturer in the medical graduate course in Libya and additionally handled some courses for the Membership/ Fellows of the Royal College of Physicians (UK), Membership of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and pharmacy studies. His lectures were interactive and he was popular among the students. His lectures were even attended by some college officials.

He was satisfied with his stay and work in Libya. He felt that the country provided good state support to its population and a good living standard. The country also offered support to foreign staff working there; providing them residence and other amenities. Dr Tandon could avail free medical support for himself and his wife and could lead a comfortable life. He did not face major language issues as Arabic is somewhat similar to the Urdu spoken in UP.

### **RETURNING BACK**

In 1984, while working in Libya, Dr. Tandon woke up to a rude shock when he received the news that the UP government had terminated him from his job at the medical college. He was stunned by this sudden development. He had never intended to live outside India forever since he was quite attached to his own country. In order to address this issue, he decided to return back to India. His colleagues and other officials tried to make him change his mind, but he needed to come back. Without much preparation, Dr. Tandon returned to India after four years of work abroad.

When he returned, Dr. Tandon paid several visits to the government department in an attempt to get back his job. Amidst his struggles, he decided to start his private clinical practice. Through his determination and efforts, his clinic started running well. He was earning Rs. 4,000 every month, so with this, and the money saved from working abroad, he was able to build his house in Meerut. In 1986, after the chief minister's interventions, Dr. Tandon was able to get his job back in the medical college. Before his old job could be granted back to him, he had to clear an interview where most of the interviewers had been his students. He took this challenge with stride and did not flinch.

He then joined as a junior lecturer in Kanpur with a monthly salary of Rs. 2,000 as his experience was not considered and he had to join at the starting level. After much effort, he was able to convince the current Health Secretary in Lucknow to reinstate him to his seniority. His post was then revised to that of Reader and he was paid a salary respectable to that post and also the arrears. He was able to establish both his sons in their respective careers and get his daughter married.

After working with the government system for many years, Dr. Tandon decided to retire in 2002 as he felt disillusioned with the system. Dr. Tandon felt that the government health and education systems did not appreciate the performance of its employees, and demonstrated more preference towards people who are better at "going around saying sir, sir.." to please their seniors.

## WORKING IN OTHER COUNTRIES

Post retirement, Dr. Tandon continued to work in the capacity of a teacher and took up many assignments in countries outside India. In 2002, he obtained a job in Ethiopia through some friends. The recruitment interview was conducted in Delhi at the Ashoka Hotel. Though he had not applied formally, he could enter the recruitment process because he was senior and recognized in his profession. With his qualifications and experience, he could also demand a good salary. All the paperwork was processed by the Ethiopian authorities along with all other arrangements. The professor received the visa for himself and his wife through the post.

In Ethiopia, he worked as the Head of the Department of Physiology in the medical college. He was provided with residence, amenities like refrigerator, gas, water heater and even cooking utensils. The job entailed long hours and the living conditions were not so good; the surroundings were unclean, and the rainy weather was not easy to live in. In Ethiopia, the social culture was very different and Dr Tandon felt uncomfortable at times. He recounts one such incident when a female staff had come to him to seek some medical help. He asked her to point out which part of her body was ailing and she did not hesitate to strip completely. This behaviour embarrassed Dr Tandon immensely.

Moreover, the country was poor and even the medical college was not well equipped. There was no Electro Cardiogramme machine, but since he had his personal machine he would often provide help, whenever required. Dr. Tandon did not receive any medical support in Ethiopia, and at times, even gave medicine to staff in need. In Ethiopia, he perceived an element of mistrust among people that might have been due to the country's political and domestic instability. After having worked in Ethiopia for 6 to 7 months, Dr. Tandon received another job offer in India, and he and his wife returned to their home country.

In 2002, Dr. Tandon also did a short assignment of 6 weeks in Mauritius. As an advisor there, his responsibilities included helping to establish a new medical college. All arrangements including tickets and visa were processed by the Mauritius authorities and handed over to him. The standard of living in this country was very comfortable due to its flourishing economy.

After coming back to India in 2003, he joined as the Principal and Director of a private medical college in UP. For 1 year and 9 months, he was part of a panel of specialists responsible for establishing the new medical college.

While working at the medical college Dr. Tandon received a job assignment in China through professional contacts and based on his vast experience. For him, the job seemed to be more challenging than his current one and promised a better pay. So, in 2005 he quit his post in India and went to Nan Chong, in Sichuan district of China where he became a Professor in a public medical college. The college authorities had taken care of all his personal requirements of housing, food and other support. He found the Chinese people to be very supportive. The weather was good and "nurtured good health", which he very much appreciated. The one major challenge faced in China was the language, but he and his wife were able to manage their routine chores by signs and gestures. After working for less than two years, Dr. Tandon felt homesick and decided to return to India in 2006.

Back in India, Dr. Tandon joined as Professor in Physiology at a newly opened Medical College in Muzzafarnagar, where he is working currently.

## WHAT HE LEARNED

Dr. Tandon has an in-depth understanding of the migration process having worked in numerous locations. He found that work culture in most foreign countries was generally good. Their systems were governed by professionalism and discipline, with the exception of Ethiopia where there was uncertainty and instability in the country. He summarises the work culture in other countries saying that 'everyone works'. He feels this is in contrast to India, where most workers, from the desk staff at the airport to the staff in offices are lethargic and hardly work.

He says he has been lucky to have co-workers who have been cooperative. He believes that if one is "focused on his work, does not try to disturb the system, deals well with his co-workers, does not try to force his opinion onto others nor tries to

create any nuisance, she/he would be easily accepted in any new and foreign place of work. She/he would earn respect and enjoy the comfort and life provided.” According to him, different countries provide different kinds of support to the migrant workers working in their country. This primarily depends on the economic situation of the country and the resources allocated to invite and retain foreign workers.

In India, he states that corruption affects the system at all levels- from clerks to administrators and policymakers. Consequently, ethics are compromised as there is no established decent work culture in any department including health. Dr. Tandon feels there is a breakdown of social structure of the Indian society and this is reflected in the lack of respect for people, lack of decorum in interactions, and absence of honesty. He adds that even the field of research is rife with dishonesty.

## LESSONS LEARNED

In Dr. Tandon opinion, people must avail a chance to go abroad as it contributes to the overall development of an individual. The thinking of a person gains in breadth, the concepts become clear, and the boundaries of narrow thinking and criticism, of others, can be overcome. Working abroad also provides the opportunity to make good money and build up one’s savings. Individuals can learn and inculcate good ethics and culture into their work through these experiences. Having said that, he feels that the best place to live and work is still one’s own country. There are choices and freedom one can enjoy here that are not available elsewhere, even in the best of places.

Policymakers in India should be far-sighted and honest, says Dr. Tandon. This would promote a better atmosphere of work and culture in India and will then attract professionals to return.

## CONCLUDING

Dr. Tandon explained the ancient system of division of castes in India which was based on the work a person did, and how it was propagated to promote a culture of work and discipline. The caste system at the time of its origin was very different from the narrow, demeaning entity as it is currently. According to that system, he says he has been a “Brahmin” all his life – by virtue of giving away knowledge. This choice of professions has left him poor since a lack of assets is a quality attributed to teachers or providers of knowledge. In spite of being senior in years of experience, he says he does not possess enough savings even to hold a fixed deposit in the bank and to fulfil his material responsibilities towards his family. In fact, the disbursement of his pension was delayed by 5 years and clerks asked for bribes to release it. Therefore, according to him, the Government of India should provide aid for the under-privileged to improve their quality of life, and not merely reservation of seats in education.

However, Dr. Tandon has not allowed the system to make him a victim and he has faced all difficulties with an inner strength. Most of his savings come from job stints abroad. Today he lives with those savings and spends time with his other passion – reading. He believes that only in one’s own country, ‘can we receive a robust family support system’.

Spirituality and love for his country keeps him grounded and it sustains his wish to continue to contribute to India in his own way. Dr. Tandon dreams of a system which is honest and is supportive towards quality of work and good performance. He believes that in India we can enjoy our freedom to live and work. India’s rich culture ‘nurtures the mind’ and provides individuals the mental strength to go on in the face of adversity.

<sup>1</sup> Civil surgeon is a doctor in an administrative position at the district level, responsible for directly administrating all Govt. Medical and Health Institutions for implementation of various health programmes in the District

