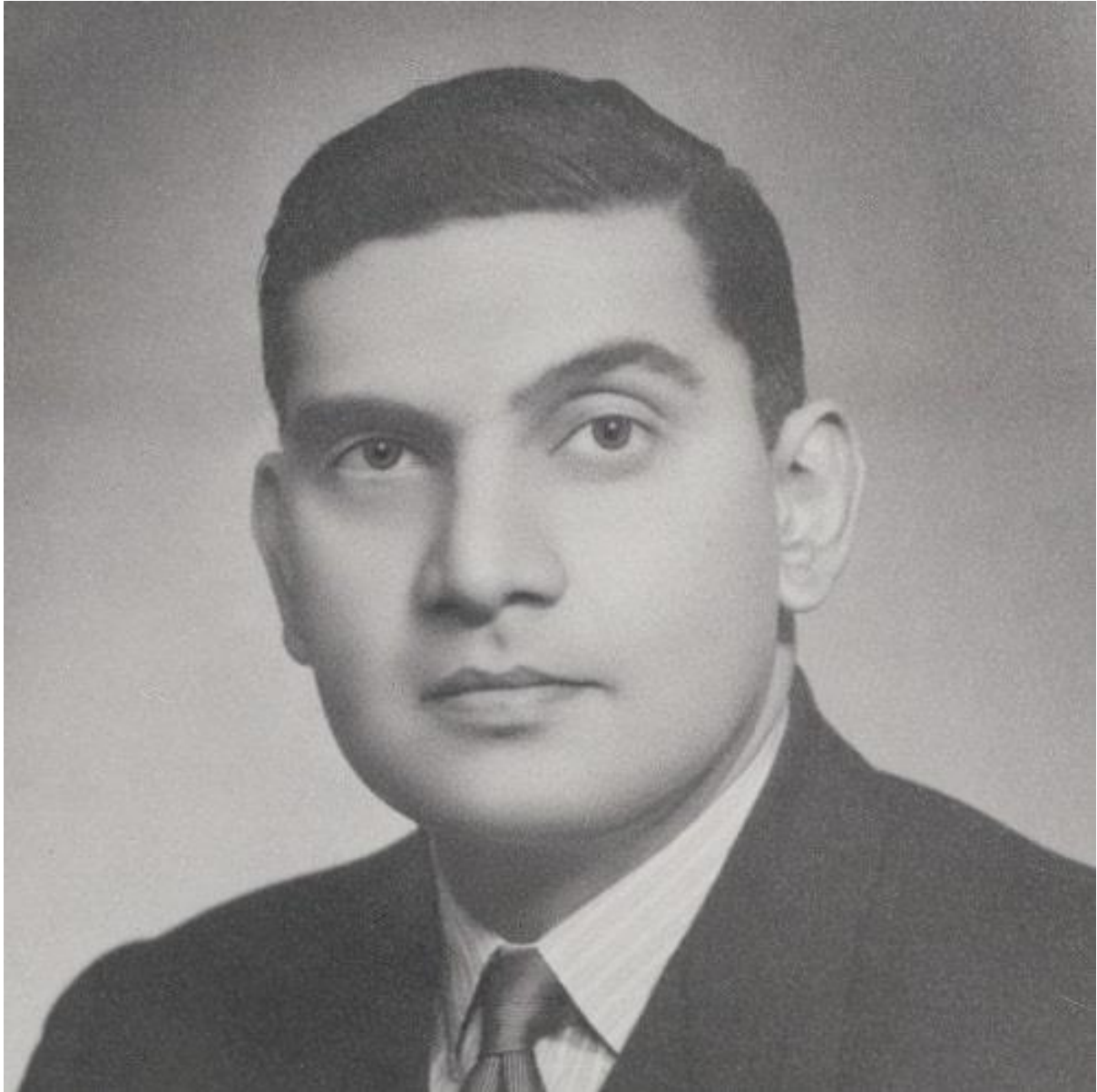


R.J. Vakil: A Biography

Rustom Jal Vakil: A Gentle Soul, Medical Pioneer, and Inspiring Teacher



b.17 July 1911 d.20 November 1974

MRCs LRCP(1934) MB BS Lond(1934) MRCP(1936) FRFPS Glasg(1937) MD(1937) DTMH(1938)
FRCP(1960)

Rustom Jal Vakil was an exceptional individual whose life was marked by compassion, dedication, and groundbreaking contributions to the field of medicine.

Born on July 17, 1911, in Bombay, India, he was the cherished only son of a respected general medical practitioner, Dr. Jai Rustom Vakil. His paternal uncle, D. Jamshed Rustom Vakil, was another eminent physician in the family. Tragically, Rustom lost his father while still in school, but his strong and determined mother became a guiding force in his life, leaving a lasting impact on his values.

Education and Early Career

As a young boy, Rustom's brilliance and desire to attend a prestigious English school led him and his mother to the office of a principal. The meeting was marked by the principal's rudeness, making both Mrs. Vakil and Rustom stand while he sat comfortably. Despite the principal's harsh rejection, Mrs. Vakil retorted that she wasn't sorry her son didn't get admitted, as he might have adopted the principal's discourteous behavior. This incident deeply impacted young Rustom. Undeterred by challenges, he excelled at Bharda New High School in Bombay and later pursued medicine at St. Thomas's Hospital Medical School in London. Accompanied by his devoted mother, they resided at the Strand Hotel while he pursued his education. Graduating with honors in 1934, Rustom earned several prestigious medals, including the Mead, Seymour, Graves Toller, Wainwright, and Lalkaka medals.

Dr. Farokh Udhwadia fondly remembers a captivating conversation with Dr. R.J. Vakil, where the latter recounted his experience during a medical examination in the UK. Being allotted 30 minutes to complete history taking, physical examination, and clinical evaluation, Dr. Vakil skilfully summarized that he could not find anything amiss with the young and healthy subject. This remarkable observation left a lasting impression on the examiner, who had attempted to deceive him with a seemingly normal case.

At St. Thomas's Hospital, London, he came under the influence of eminent cardiologists like Sir John Parkinson, Sir Maurice Cassidy, and Paul Wood. After qualifying, he held the following appointments in England (1934-38): clinical assistant in the Children's Department at St. Thomas's Hospital, casualty officer and resident anaesthetist, St. Thomas's, clinical assistant in the Medical Unit, St. Bartholomew's, clinical assistant in the Medical Unit, Guy's Hospital, house surgeon and first assistant to the Heart Hospital, Liverpool.

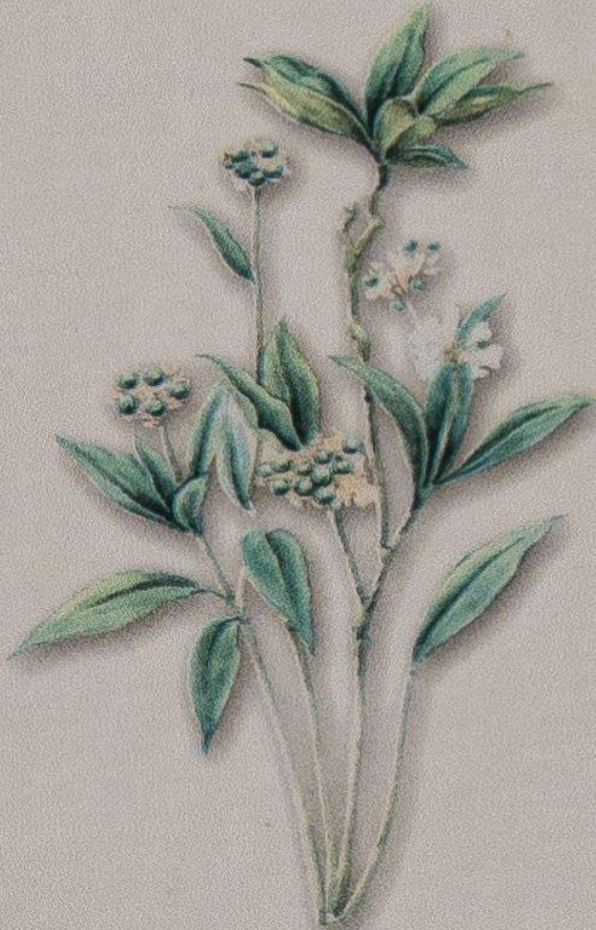
Contributions to Medicine

Upon returning to India, Dr. Vakil began his clinical practice in Bombay, where he swiftly gained recognition for his astute diagnostic skills and compassionate patient care. Specializing in cardiology, a field that was not yet a distinct subspecialty, he sought to elevate cardiology's status through meticulous research.

One of his ground breaking contributions was the study of *Rauwolfia serpentina*, an ancient Indian drug, from the roots of sarpagandha, specifically its use in treating hypertension. In October 1949, he published a seminal paper in the *British Heart Journal* that revolutionized medical therapeutics for managing hypertension. His work not only had a profound impact on patient care but also played a significant role in defining cardiology as a vital medical discipline.

सर्पगन्धा (Sarpagandha) ★ ★

Rauwolfia serpentina



Flower/Leaf
(फूल / पात)



Root
(जरा)

Rauwolfia serpentina (Indian snakeroot, sarpagandha) was mentioned in ancient Hindu scriptures and Charaka Samhita.

Dr. Vakil's contributions to medicine were widely acknowledged and celebrated. He received several prestigious awards, including the British Heart Journal's Gold Medal in 1949, the Padma Bhushan in 1958 (India's third-highest civilian award), and the International Albert Laskar Award for Medical Research, on 14th November 1957. The latter award recognized his pioneering work on the use of *Rauwolfia* in hypertension, which had a profound impact on patient care worldwide.

His other numerous awards included the first Dr. B.C. Roy Award of the Indian Medical Council 'for promoting the speciality of cardiology in India'; the Shanti Swarap Bhatnagar Award of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research for "outstanding contributions to cardiology", and the first Dhanwantiri Award in 1973 for being the most outstanding medical man of the year in India.

Rustom Jai Vakil held important medical appointments in India. He was honorary consulting physician to King Edward Memorial Hospital, Bombay, and a visiting cardiologist to Sir Nanavati Hospital, Bombay, the Sir J.J. Group of Hospitals, the Bombay Hospital, the Parsee General Hospital,

and the J.R. Railway Hospital. He was lecturer in medicine and cardiology to the Seth G.S. Medical College and Grant Medical College, Bombay.

Dr. Vakil was the Governor of the Western India Chapter of the American College of Chest Physicians, Co-Director of the All India Heart Foundation, Past President of the Cardiological Society of India, Past President of the Bombay Medical Union, Patron of the Society for the Prevention of Heart Disease, Bombay, and a Trustee of the Wadia Institute of Cardiology, Poona.

He was an elected Fellow of many international and national scientific bodies, including the American College of Cardiology, the American College of Chest Physicians, the American College of Physicians and the National Academy of Sciences of India.

The highest honor bestowed on Dr. Vakil was on 28th September 1974, when the Governor of Maharashtra inaugurated at the King Edward Memorial Hospital, Bombay, 'The Doctor Rustom Jai Vakil Institute of Cardiology and Research Centre'.

Dedicated Teacher and Humble Figure

Dr. Vakil's commitment to medicine extended beyond clinical practice. He became a highly revered teacher, and his clinical rounds were eagerly attended by students seeking to learn from his vast knowledge and wisdom. His generosity in sharing knowledge and experiences made him beloved among the medical community. Despite his remarkable achievements, Rustom remained incredibly humble and always saw the best in everyone. He refrained from speaking ill of other colleagues, even in the face of criticism.

Personal Life and Legacy

Throughout his life, Rustom Vakil found joy and fulfilment in various pursuits. He was not only a gifted clinician and teacher but also a passionate dancer, showcasing his artistic side. His journey led him to meet his second wife Jerco Shapur Madon, a dance partner, with whom he shared a fulfilling marriage (15th July 1968). They had no children.

He was the personal physician to the Governor of Bombay. Rustom was the first Asian to be honored with the prestigious International Albert Laskar Award for Medical Research.

Together with his mentee, close friend and colleague, Dr. Farokh Erach Udwadia, he co-authored the book "Diagnosis and Management of Medical Emergencies," a testament to his enduring influence on medical education and practice. He was enthralled when Dr. Farokh Udwadia presented him a copy of his book on Pulmonary Eosinophilia.

He authored numerous compelling books and thought-provoking articles, some of which include: "Clinical diagnosis" with his friend Aspi Golwalla & Edited Textbook of medicine.

He wrote a plethora of well-crafted essays, covering various topics such as: The romance of healing; Our glorious heritage, Bombay.

Sadly, Dr. Vakil's life was cut short at Bombay Hospital due to a suspected dissecting aneurysm of the aorta, which he experienced while examining a patient, in a time before modern imaging technology. His untimely passing was a loss to the medical community, but his legacy endures through the inspiration he instilled in others.

RJ Vakil's life remains a beacon of dedication, compassion, and groundbreaking contributions to medicine. His unwavering commitment to patient care, his impactful research, and his role as an inspiring teacher continue to shape the practice of medicine, leading to the evolution of pharmacotherapy for hypertension and contributing to psychopharmacology, making him an everlasting source of inspiration for doctors and healthcare professionals worldwide.