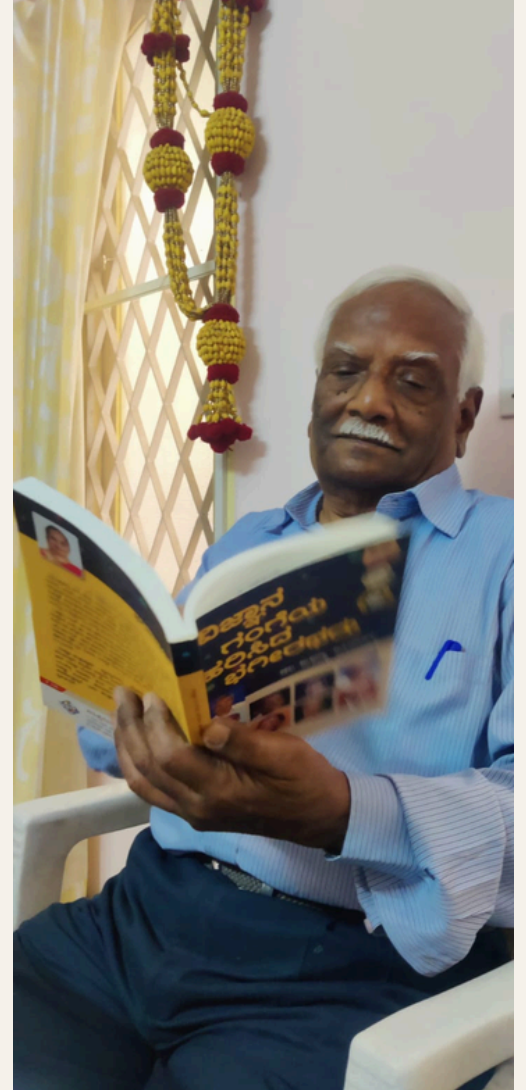


ABOUT THE GUEST

INTERVIEW

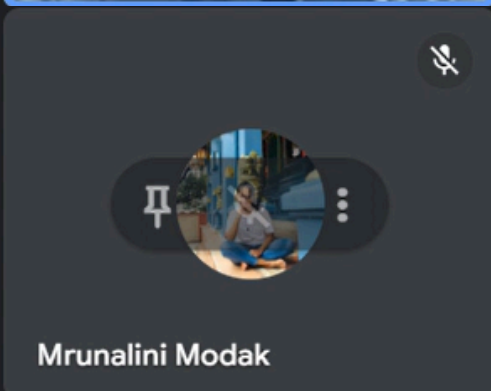
Padma Shri Dr. C. R.

Chandrashekar is a renowned psychiatrist, educator, and mental health advocate with over five decades of experience. A former professor at NIMHANS, he has dedicated his career to breaking the stigma around mental health in India. Through extensive research, counseling, and public awareness initiatives, he has impacted countless lives. Known for his compassionate approach, he has written thousands of letters and 250 books offering guidance and has contributed significantly to mental health education and psychiatry. His work continues to inspire professionals and the general public alike.

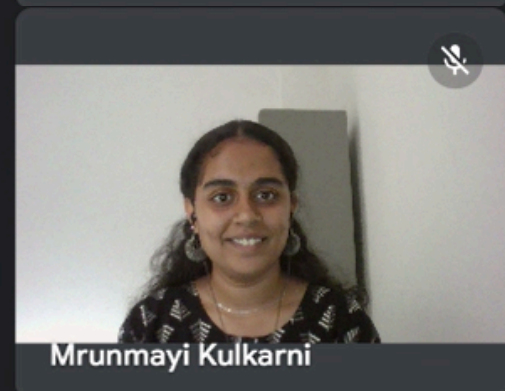


ANIL VARTAK

Abhijeet Chavan



Rasika Walhekar



MEETING WITH DR. CHANDRASHEKAR

A CONVERSATION WITH PADMA SHRI DR. C. R. CHANDRASHEKHAR: A JOURNEY THROUGH MENTAL HEALTH

The interview session with the esteemed Padma Shri Dr. C. R. Chandrashekhara was nothing short of enlightening. From the moment he was introduced by Mrunmayi Kulkarni, the session flowed seamlessly into a heartfelt discussion about his journey in the field of mental health, the challenges he has witnessed, and the wisdom he has gathered over five decades of dedicated service.

A Life Dedicated to Mental Health

Dr. Chandrashekhara shared his experiences in the field of mental health spanning over 52 years, starting in 1973. He reflected on the state of mental health care during the early years, highlighting the limited number of doctors available for numerous patients. He spoke about the history of mental hospitals in India, initially established by the British, and the persistent stigma surrounding mental illness. He emphasized how mental health disorders were often labeled with derogatory terms in various Indian languages.

During his early years, mental health treatments were limited to Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) and a few drugs. Over the years, the number of psychiatrists has increased to approximately 9,000, but the ratio remains inadequate compared to India's vast population. He noted that even educated individuals hesitate to accept mental health conditions like depression, often attributing symptoms to lack of sleep or loss of appetite while readily acknowledging physical ailments such as diabetes or cancer.

Dr. Chandrashekhara highlighted the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health, leading to increased depression, anxiety, isolation, and lack of family support. He also spoke about the implementation of the National Mental Health Program in over 400 districts across India.

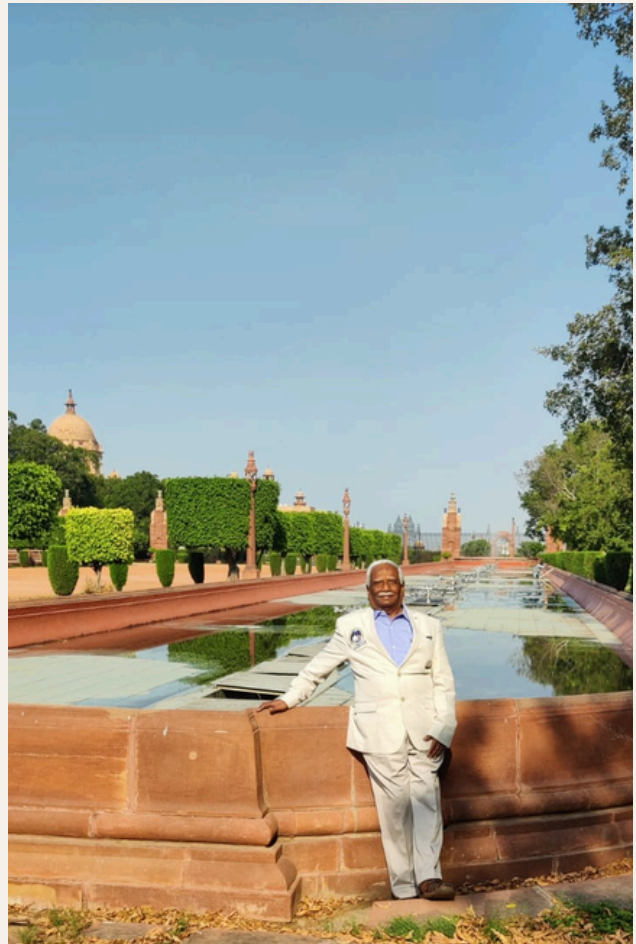


Inspiration and Influences

When asked about the pivotal moments that shaped his career, Dr. Chandrashekhara credited several key figures:

- Smt. Triveni: A psychologist who visited mental hospitals and wrote over ten books on mental health. One of her stories was adapted into the film *Sharapanjara*, portraying a woman's struggle with mental illness.
- M. Shivram: A coordinator at Bangalore Medical College and a renowned Kannada writer whose book *Manamantha* received the Kendra Sahitya Academy Award, the only science-based book to achieve this honor.
- Dr. H. S. Narayan: A psychiatrist who ran free clinics and mentored Dr. Chandrashekhara, inspiring him to pursue psychiatry.

Dr. Chandrashekhara joined the Bangalore Mental Hospital in 1974, later pursuing advanced studies. He completed his Diploma in Psychological Medicine (DPM) in 1975, followed by an MD, and eventually became a faculty member at NIMHANS. He worked at NIMHANS until his retirement in 2013 and described it as a fulfilling journey in psychiatry.



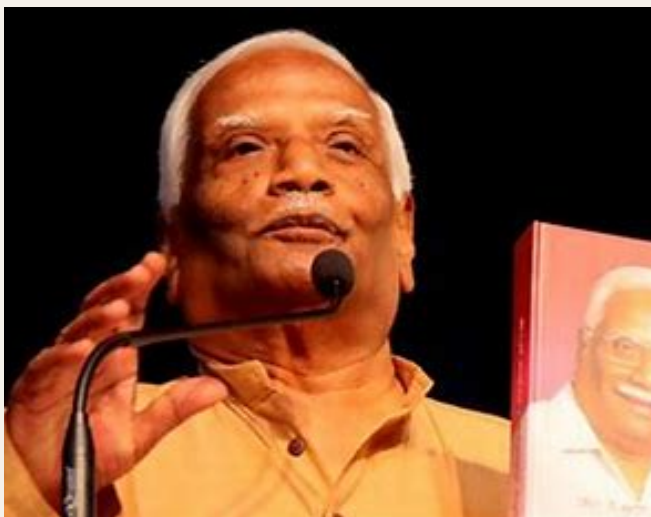
Facing Loss with Resilience

When asked about dealing with the loss of his parents, wife, and beloved pets, Dr. Chandrashekhara acknowledged that joy and sorrow are intrinsic parts of life. He emphasized that hardships, including financial struggles and career setbacks, are universal experiences. He credited his resilience to his passion for his work and maintaining a positive outlook.

He also briefly discussed the teachings of *Bhakti, Jnana, and Karma Yoga*, along with insights from the *Mahabharata*. He encouraged simple living, fulfilling basic needs, and giving back to society while maintaining a balanced approach to life.

Letter Writing and Counseling

Dr. Chandrashekhara spoke about his long-standing practice of writing letters. Before the advent of telephones, he wrote over 40,000 letters, conducting postal



counseling for those in need. He compared this with today's digital era, where visual counseling has become prevalent.

On the topic of stigma, he noted that many people associate mental illnesses with past karma and seek religious solutions rather than medical treatment. He highlighted that even today, conditions like leprosy and vitiligo carry significant stigma, despite medical advancements.

Mental Health Awareness and Education

Dr. Chandrashekhar stressed the need for increased mental health awareness and education, particularly at the school level. He suggested incorporating scientific knowledge about mental health into the curriculum alongside traditional subjects. He emphasized:

- Understanding the Mind-Body Connection: Educating people that mental and physical health are interrelated and that 80% of disorders are psychosomatic.
- Encouraging Inquiry: Encouraging individuals to question and seek scientific explanations about mental health.

- Spreading Awareness: Utilizing word-of-mouth and media to communicate that mental health disorders are treatable with modern medicine and therapy.

Giving Back to Society

Dr. Chandrashekhar expressed his belief in giving back to society. He emphasized that excessive wealth is unnecessary and highlighted the importance of philanthropy. He shared that his first salary was ₹600, while his current pension is ₹1.3 lakh. Believing in the concept of giving back, he has donated his earnings to NIMHANS to support mental health initiatives. He encouraged generosity and social responsibility, urging people to contribute to the well-being of the less fortunate.

Conclusion

The session concluded with a vote of thanks delivered by Mrunmayi Kulkarni, acknowledging the contributions of all participants, Dr. Anil Vartak, and especially Padma Shri Dr. C. R. Chandrashekhar for his invaluable insights and unwavering commitment to mental health awareness.

Mrunmayi Mahesh Kulkarni
SYBA Psychology Student, Fergusson College
Intern, Ekalavya Foundation for Mental Health

