Tribute

Reflections on the Journey of Padma Shri Prof. Dr. Ashok Kumar Grover

An Extraordinary Clinician, Visionary Teacher, Distinguished Researcher, Institution Builder, and Global Leader in Ophthalmology

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Abstract

Every generation of medicine is shaped by a small number of individuals whose influence extends far beyond their own clinical practice. Their contributions redefine discipline, establish institutions, inspire generations of physicians, and alter the trajectory of professional education. Padma Shri Prof. Dr. Ashok Kumar Grover represents one such transformative figure in Indian and international ophthalmology. Widely regarded as one of the pioneers of modern oculoplastic surgery in India and the Asia-Pacific region, his career spans nearly five decades of exceptional clinical service, surgical innovation, academic scholarship, educational reform, professional leadership, and humanitarian commitment. As Chairman of Vision Eye Centres, New Delhi, former Chairman of the Department of Ophthalmology at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, and a distinguished leader of organisations including the All India Ophthalmological Society, the Oculoplastics Association of India, the Asia-Pacific Society of Ophthalmic Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, the Oculoplastic Society of South Asia, the Ophthalmology Foundation, and the World Society of Ophthalmic Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgery, Dr. Grover has influenced ophthalmology at national, regional, and global levels. This article reflects upon his remarkable journey, examining not only his professional accomplishments but also the enduring values of scholarship, mentorship, humility, institution building, and service that define his legacy. Rather than merely chronicling a distinguished career, it seeks to understand why his contributions continue to shape the future of ophthalmology and why generations of ophthalmologists regard him as one of the profession's most influential teachers and leaders.

Keywords: Ashok Kumar Grover; Oculoplastic Surgery; Ophthalmology; Medical Education; Surgical Innovation; Mentorship; Professional Leadership; Humanitarian Eye Care.

Introduction

The Measure of an Extraordinary Career

Medicine is often described as both science and an art. Yet there exists a third dimension that receives far less attention—the responsibility to leave the profession stronger than one found it. Most physicians devote themselves to caring for individual patients. Some contribute to research that advances scientific understanding. A smaller number become influential teachers whose students perpetuate their methods and values. Exceptionally few, however, succeed in integrating all these roles while simultaneously building institutions, transforming educational systems, creating professional organisations, and inspiring successive generations across national boundaries. Padma Shri Prof. Dr. Ashok Kumar Grover belongs to this exceptionally small fraternity (Figure 1).

His professional life cannot be understood simply by recounting the positions he has held, the surgeries he has performed, or the awards he has received. Such achievements, remarkable though they are, represent only the visible manifestations of a far deeper legacy. The enduring significance of Dr. Grover's career lies in the systems he has strengthened, the standards he has elevated, and the people he has inspired.

Life in Service, Teaching and Vision

The history of modern ophthalmology in India has been characterised by extraordinary progress during the past

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Figure 1: A presence that commands respect, a warmth that draws people close – Dr. Ashok Kumar Grover - A lifetime of achievement carried with grace and humility

five decades. Subspecialities, technological innovation, microsurgical advances, structured postgraduate education, international collaboration, and evidence-based clinical practice have transformed both patient care and professional training. While these developments have been collective achievements, certain individuals have served as catalysts, accelerating progress through vision, determination, and sustained leadership. Dr. Grover has been one of those catalysts.

His career has unfolded alongside the maturation of Indian ophthalmology into a globally respected discipline, yet it would be inaccurate to suggest that he merely participated in this evolution. Rather, he helped shape it. Through clinical innovation, educational reform, organisational leadership, and international collaboration, he has contributed significantly to defining the standards by which contemporary ophthalmology is practiced and taught.

Today, he serves as Chairman of Vision Eye Centres, New Delhi, an institution recognised for postgraduate and fellowship training, and continues as Senior Consultant at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, one of India's most respected centres of ophthalmic excellence. His leadership extends well beyond institutional practice, encompassing major international organisations dedicated to ophthalmic education, oculoplastic surgery, and ocular trauma.

Yet colleagues rarely begin describing him by listing these positions. Instead, they speak of his generosity, his meticulous surgical technique, intellectual curiosity, his insistence upon academic integrity, his extraordinary memory for students, his willingness to encourage young ophthalmologists long before they become recognised. These qualities explain why his influence has remained remarkably constant despite dramatic changes in medicine itself.

A Career Defined by Purpose Rather Than Position

Professional success in medicine is frequently associated with prestigious appointments and honors. While Dr. Grover's curriculum vitae certainly reflects both, reducing his contribution to offices held would obscure the philosophy that has consistently guided his work. Throughout nearly five decades of clinical practice, one principle emerges repeatedly: every achievement became an opportunity to strengthen the profession itself. When he accepted positions within professional organisations, the objective was not representation but reform. When he developed educational curricula, the goal was not academic recognition but improved patient care through better training. When he helped establish professional societies, he envisioned communities of scholarship rather than administrative bodies. When he mentored young ophthalmologists, he invested in the future rather than celebrating the present. This consistent orientation toward long-term institutional development distinguishes his career from those built primarily upon individual accomplishment.

The Evolution of a Surgeon

Foundations: Values Learned in Childhood

Born on 30 October 1955 in Agra, Dr. Grover's childhood was shaped by constant movement across northern India due to his father's transferable government service. His schooling took place in seven different schools across Barabanki, Varanasi, Amritsar, Moradabad, and Chandigarh. What appeared challenging at the time ultimately became one of the greatest formative influences of his life. Repeated transitions taught adaptability, resilience, and humility. Living in smaller cities fostered groundedness and an appreciation of simplicity. Exposure to different cultures and environments cultivated flexibility and openness to new experiences. The strongest influences, however, came from home. His father embodied integrity, discipline, responsibility, and honesty. His mother instilled kindness, compassion, generosity, and concern for others. His elder brother and sisters provided examples of dedication and perseverance. Growing up in a financially disciplined household taught the value of hard work, thrift, gratitude, and respect for opportunities. Many of these lessons later became defining characteristics of his professional life (Figure 2).

Maulana Azad Medical College: Learning Resilience

Admission to Maulana Azad Medical College represented a major turning point. Having consistently ranked among the highest-performing students during school years, Dr. Grover suddenly found himself in a highly competitive

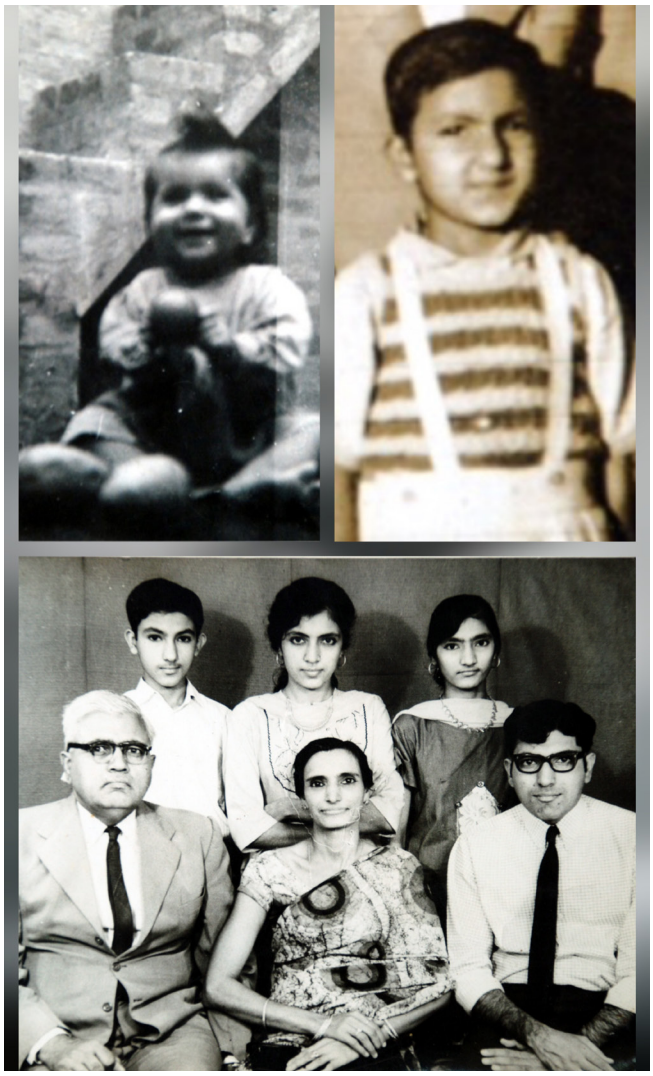

Figure 2: "Before the accolades and achievements, there was family - The foundation of a remarkable life.": Dr A.K. Grover 10 months old at his home in Agra, 9 years old enjoying an evening with siblings at Barabanki; the youngest of all 4 children, loved by father Shri I.D. Grover and mother, Santosh

environment populated by exceptionally talented peers from elite educational backgrounds. The transition was difficult. The shift from a predominantly Hindi-medium educational background to a largely English-speaking academic environment produced a sense of insecurity. The academic workload seemed overwhelming. For the first time in his life, he was no longer among the obvious academic leaders. The experience proved transformative. Rather than discouraging him, it taught perseverance. Academic distinctions followed, including distinction in pathology and the prestigious Colonel D. R. Thapar Gold Medal in Surgery. More importantly, these years instilled a lifelong belief that excellence is not entitlement but the result of sustained effort (Figure 3).

Dr. Rajendra Prasad Centre: The Making of an Ophthalmologist

If medical college shaped the student, Dr. Rajendra Prasad Centre for Ophthalmic Sciences at AIIMS shaped the



Figure 3: Recognition for excellence at the dawn of a remarkable career: Gen. D.R. Thapar Gold medal from Field Marshal Manekshaw - at Maulana Azad Medical College

ophthalmologist. It was here that Dr. Grover came under the influence of legendary mentors, including Prof. L. P. Agarwal, Prof. N. N. Sood, Prof. Y. Dayal, and Prof. Madan Mohan. These teachers imparted lessons that extended far beyond technical competence. They taught the importance of total commitment, attention to detail, respect for fundamentals, lifelong learning, excellence in teaching, and responsibility towards patients. Years later, his student Dr. Siddharth Aggarwal aptly captures the essence of Dr. Grover's approach, describing him as "a very hard taskmaster because he himself was taught by the best." His exacting standards were a reflection of the exceptional mentors who had shaped him. The years at RP Centre also planted the seeds of what became one of the defining passions of his life, teaching (Figures 4 & 5).

The Surgeon

Every accomplished surgeon develops through years of disciplined observation, repeated practice, and continuous refinement. Few, however, achieve mastery across disciplines as diverse as oculoplastic surgery, orbital disease, lacrimal disorders, ophthalmic trauma, reconstructive surgery, cataract and refractive surgery, glaucoma surgery, squint surgery, and cornea surgery, while simultaneously maintaining an active academic



Figure 4: A young Dr. Grover receiving appreciation: Post Graduation at Dr. R.P. Centre, AIIMS, 1980

and educational career. The technical complexity of oculoplastic surgery makes such accomplishment particularly noteworthy.

The 8 years spent at Guru Nanak Eye Centre, Maulana Azad Medical College, a premier government teaching medical institution as a faculty, surgeon and teacher with mentorship of Professor A K Gupta, prepared him for the later years as surgeon and teacher at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital and Vision Eye Centres.

Unlike many surgical specialties, oculoplastics demands simultaneous attention to function, anatomy, aesthetics, psychology, and long-term rehabilitation. Success cannot be measured solely by anatomical correction. It must also restore confidence. It must preserve identity. It must improve quality of life. For patients with congenital deformities, orbital tumours, eyelid malpositions, thyroid eye disease, severe facial trauma, or complex reconstructive needs, surgical intervention often represents much more than treatment. It becomes the beginning of personal recovery.

Throughout his career, Dr. Grover has consistently demonstrated this broader understanding of patient care. His surgical philosophy reflects meticulous preparation, thoughtful planning, precise execution, and profound respect for tissue. Residents trained under him frequently remark that observing him operate is an education not merely in technique but in disciplined thinking. Every incision reflects purpose; every maneuver illustrates economy of movement; every decision embodies clinical judgement refined through decades of experience. He has carried out more than a hundred thousand surgeries, over these years with extremely gratified patients.

Creating a Specialty Rather Than Joining One

History remembers certain physicians because they excelled within an established discipline. Others are remembered because they helped create discipline itself. The development of oculoplastic surgery in India provides a compelling example of the latter. When Dr. Grover began his career, structured academic pathways in oculoplastics remained limited. Opportunities for specialised training were relatively few, organised scientific meetings were uncommon, and professional collaboration occurred largely through general ophthalmology forums. Recognising these limitations, he appreciated that the future of the specialty depended upon far more than individual surgical excellence. It required organised education, structured fellowships, dedicated scientific societies and international collaboration. Most importantly, it required convincing young ophthalmologists that oculoplastic surgery represented an intellectually rich and clinically rewarding career. Over the following decades, Dr. Grover emerged as one of the principal architects of that transformation.



Figure 5: On the stage as Ophthalmic Research Association Secretary at AIIMS (1980), with Prof Madan Mohan, Prof LP Agarwal and Prof Y Dayal – A young academician among the giants who shaped an era

His role as Founder General Secretary of the World Society of Ophthalmic Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgery (WSOPRAS) symbolises this vision on the international stage. By helping establish a truly global organisation devoted to oculoplastic surgery, he contributed to creating a platform through which knowledge, innovation, and collaboration could transcend geographical boundaries (Figure 6).

Equally influential was his contribution to the Oculoplastics Association of India (OPAI), where, as Founder Honorary Secretary and later President, he helped establish the academic framework that nurtured successive generations of Indian oculoplastic surgeons.

These organisations became far more than professional associations. Under visionary leadership they evolved into communities dedicated to scientific exchange, structured education, mentorship, and professional excellence. Today, the strength of Indian oculoplastic surgery owes much to those foundational efforts.

The Teacher Who Educated a Generation

The greatest physicians are remembered by their patients. The greatest academicians are remembered by their students. The rare physician-scholar who is remembered equally by both leaves a legacy that transcends individual accomplishment and becomes embedded within the very fabric of a profession.

For nearly five decades, Dr. Ashok Kumar Grover has exemplified this rare union of clinician and educators. Although his reputation as an outstanding surgeon is universally acknowledged, it is perhaps as a teacher that his influence has reached its widest audience. Across India and throughout the international ophthalmic community, one encounters departmental heads, fellowship directors, distinguished consultants, and emerging academic leaders who describe themselves, proudly and often emotionally, as "Dr. Grover's students."

His student from Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, Dr Parul, recalls fondly and says "A visionary ophthalmologist, a gifted teacher with a passion for badminton, travel, music and a Padma Shri Awardee yet what makes him truly special is the warmth and humility with which he touches every life around him. His passion for medicine and zest for life continues to inspire us all."

This relationship extends beyond formal postgraduate training. Many never trained directly under him. Some encountered him through a single instructional course. Others first met him during a live surgical demonstration or an international congress. Still others discovered him through his editorials, curriculum initiatives, educational workshops, or structured examination programmes. Yet they all describe a remarkably similar experience. They found a teacher who never regarded education as the transfer of information alone. Rather, education represented the cultivation of judgement.

One of the oculoplastic surgeons from the Asia-Pacific region, Dr. Neoh Vanessa, fondly states that she met Dr. Grover 20 years back as a junior Oculoplastic surgeon at a conference, and he has been an 'eminent teacher and a surgeon extraordinaire' for her since then (Figure 7).



Figure 6: At the first WSOPRAS meeting, Dubai 2023 with co-founders of the society: Dr. Don Kikkawa, Dr. Naresh Joshi and Dr. Vinod Gauba - A global fraternity, built on shared knowledge and shared friendships



Figure 7: Where professional collaboration across continents connected by Ophthalmology becomes lasting friendship – With Dr Vanessa Neoh, President, Malaysia Oculoplastics Society in 2014 APSOPRS, Delhi and at APAO 2023, Kaula Lumpur.

Throughout his career, Dr. Grover has consistently demonstrated that surgical skill can be taught through repetition, but wisdom develops only through thoughtful mentorship. His teaching therefore extends beyond anatomy and surgical technique into clinical reasoning, ethical responsibility, scientific curiosity, and professional conduct. Dr J.S. Bhalla recalls that discussions with him rarely ended with the answer to a question. Instead, they concluded with another question one that encouraged independent thinking. He further adds that this approach, which he uses effortlessly, reflects a philosophy deeply rooted in academic medicine - *"Great teachers do not create followers. They create future teachers."*

Heading the Department of Ophthalmology at the Post Graduate Institute, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Hospital, Delhi, Dr Bhalla expresses that Dr. Grover became a mentor and role model for him. Dr. Grover not only taught him but inspired him to embrace leadership roles and encouraged him to aspire to greater heights. In many ways, Dr Grover's mentorship helped shape Dr Bhalla's own journey, enabling him to reach the heights of professional and academic leadership that he occupies today.

A Teacher Remembered Long After the Lecture

Among Dr. Grover's countless achievements, it is perhaps the smallest moments that remain most vivid in the memories of those fortunate enough to have worked with him.

Former students rarely begin by describing their awards or leadership positions. Instead, they remember the reassuring smile before a difficult surgery. They remember the quiet conversation after a complication. They remember the confidence he placed in a young resident when that resident had little confidence in himself or herself.

Many recall that entering his operating theatre was initially intimidating not because of fear of criticism, but because of the extraordinary standards he set for himself. Yet that apprehension quickly disappeared. Errors became opportunities for learning rather than occasions for embarrassment. Questions were welcomed. Curiosity was encouraged. Every case became a lesson not only in surgery but in judgement, patience and humility.

Perhaps that explains why so many former trainees continue to seek his advice years even decades after completing their training.

Dr. Rohini Grover vividly remembers one of the most unforgettable experiences of her career a remarkable 24-hour operation theatre day spent alongside Dr. Grover. It was not merely a marathon of surgeries, but an experience filled with energy, camaraderie and music, reflecting Dr. Grover's love for music and his ability to bring joy even into the most demanding of days. During surgeries, he would often engage his residents in lively quizzes, asking them to identify movies, music directors and singers. He was, in many ways, the "Amitabh Bachchan of the OT KBC," effortlessly quizzing them on current affairs and Bollywood music while operating. For Dr. Rohini, that extraordinary day remains a cherished memory a glimpse into the warmth, wit and infectious enthusiasm that made Dr. Grover such a memorable teacher and mentor.

Humanitarian Service: Compassion Beyond Institutions

The history of medicine reminds us that professional excellence acquires its deepest meaning only when placed in the service of society. Throughout his distinguished career, Dr. Grover has consistently demonstrated that humanitarian work is not an occasional charitable activity but an integral professional responsibility. Over several decades, he has participated in numerous charitable eye camps providing free surgery and ophthalmic care to economically disadvantaged populations.

Among his most remarkable humanitarian initiatives was the organisation of advanced surgical outreach programmes in the remote Himalayan region of Ranikhet, Uttarakhand. For ten consecutive years, from 1998 to 2007, sophisticated ophthalmic equipment was transported into an area where specialised surgical services had previously been unavailable. Thousands of advanced cataract procedures were performed without cost, bringing modern ophthalmic care to communities located hundreds of kilometres from tertiary hospitals (Figure 8).

Significantly, the programme concluded not because interest diminished but because a permanent surgical facility had been successfully established locally. This outcome reflects a recurring theme throughout Dr. Grover's career. His objective has never been temporary relief. It has been sustainable capacity building.

Beyond clinical outreach, he has actively contributed to national public health initiatives involving blindness prevention (office bearer of the National Society of Prevention of Blindness), Vision 2020 India, the National Programme for Control of Blindness (as member advisory committee), governmental advisory bodies, and numerous professional organisations dedicated to improving eye care delivery across India.

These activities illustrate a physician who recognised that improving vision requires more than excellent hospitals. It requires stronger public health systems.

The Person Behind the Surgeon: Leadership Rooted in Humility

Those who know Dr. Grover professionally often speak first of his discipline. Those who know him personally speak of something else entirely. Despite occupying some of the highest offices in ophthalmology, he has remained remarkably approachable.

Young residents frequently recount their surprise when an internationally renowned speaker would patiently answer questions long after conference sessions had concluded. Colleagues from abroad often describe how professional conversations quickly evolved into warm friendships. For him, hierarchy has never defined relationships. Respect has.



Figure 8: Where there was a need, there was a way: Dr Grover at the Ranikhet Eye Camp, bringing care closer to those who needed it most

This combination of academic excellence and personal humility is perhaps one of the principal reasons why his influence extends so naturally across generations.

People admire accomplished surgeons. They follow trusted leaders. But they remember kind human beings.

When speaking to Dr. G. Chandra Sekhar, Vice Chairman Emeritus at LV Prasad Eye Institute, he fondly recalls an incident from his postgraduate days when Dr. Grover had the courage to stand up to Prof. L.P. Agarwal in support of a senior postgraduate student who, he believed, had been treated unfairly. Dr. Grover did not hesitate to speak up, even though the senior-most professor in the department was against the student. This incident reflects the courage, integrity and unwavering sense of justice that defined Dr. Grover. For many, he is someone who stood by what was right, even when doing so was difficult. His ability to inspire others through both his actions and principles is one of the many qualities for which he continues to be remembered and deeply admired. Dr. Chanda Sekhar concludes by saying, "my senior from the RPC days of 1979-82, who mentored and guided my baby steps in ophthalmology, is a man of immeasurable kindness, amazing humility, great intellect and ever helpful"

Leadership and Institution Building

Sir Ganga Ram Hospital: An Academic Legacy

Outstanding departments do not emerge accidentally. They develop through years of thoughtful leadership, consistent academic standards, careful faculty development, and unwavering commitment to excellence.

For more than two decades as Chairman of the Department of Ophthalmology at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, Dr. Grover transformed the department into one of India's foremost centres for postgraduate education, fellowship training, and subspecialty development.

Under his stewardship, the department became the country's first centre recognised for FRCS (Glasgow) examinations, an accredited venue for International Council of Ophthalmology examinations, an important centre for the Fellowship of the AIOS Collegium, and a nationally respected institution for National Board Postgraduate Education. Dr. Grover has been an examiner for over 25 years and has been invited as an examiner for the Royal College, Glasgow on more than 30 occasions at various countries around the globe.

Its reputation attracted trainees from across India and overseas, reflecting confidence not merely in clinical exposure but in the quality of mentorship available within the department. Many of today's academic leaders in ophthalmology trace formative years of their professional development to this remarkable educational environment.

A Bond Beyond Colleagues

Among the many professional relationships that have enriched Dr. Grover's remarkable journey, one deserves a special mention his nearly 29-year association with Dr. Shaloo Bageja at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital.

For Dr. Shaloo, Dr. Grover was much more than a senior colleague. He was her teacher, mentor and guide someone from whom she learnt not only the nuances of the profession, but also the values of dedication, excellence and integrity. His vast experience and wisdom made him a person she could always look up to, seek guidance from and learn from.

With the passage of time, this teacher student relationship blossomed into an extraordinary professional partnership. Dr. Shaloo evolved into one of Dr. Grover's most trusted colleagues and an integral part of his professional journey. Standing beside him through the years, she brought her own expertise, strength and commitment, complementing his vision and contributing significantly to the work they built together.

What makes their association truly special is the rare balance it embodies the respect of a student, the trust of a colleague, and the understanding that comes from years of working together towards a shared purpose.

Perhaps no equation captures their journey better than 1 + 1 = 11 a partnership where two individuals, each accomplished in their own right, have together created something far greater than the sum of their individual contributions.

Vision Eye Centres: Extending the Educational Mission

For many clinicians, private practice represents the culmination of professional success. For Dr. Grover, it became another platform for education. Under his leadership, Vision Eye Centres evolved into far more than a tertiary referral institution. It became an internationally recognised centre for postgraduate education and fellowship training. The institution achieved distinction as the first examination centre in India accredited for the FRCOphth (London) examinations, while simultaneously serving as a recognised centre for Ophthalmology Foundation examinations and National Board residency training. Its fellowship programmes attract ophthalmologists not only from India but from numerous countries seeking advanced training in oculoplastic surgery and related subspecialties (Figure 9).

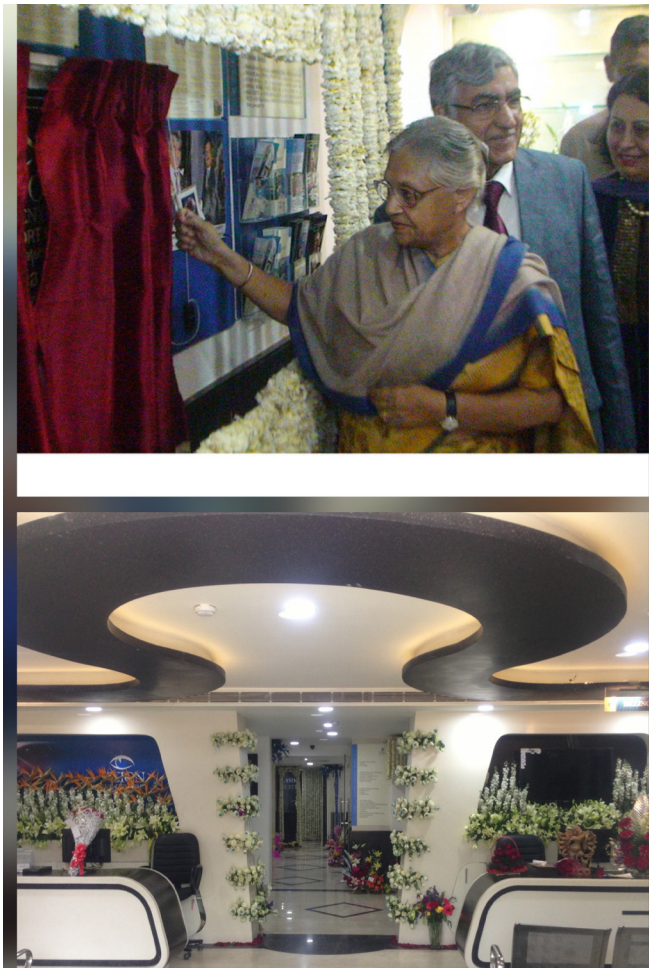

Figure 9: A vision beyond medicine - building institutions where excellence, compassion, and care come together, reflecting Dr Grover's commitment to building centres of excellence in ophthalmic care. Inauguration of Vision Eye Centre, Siri Fort Road, 2013 by then Delhi Chief Minister- Mrs. Sheila Dixit.

This transformation reflects one of the defining themes of Dr. Grover's career. Every institution with which he has been associated has become stronger because education remained central to its mission. Teaching was never an additional responsibility. It was the institution's defining purpose. education as a lifelong responsibility. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Dr. Grover's educational philosophy is that it has never been limited by age, position, or achievement. His wife, Mrs. Poonam Grover, a trained lawyer, played a pivotal role in the development and management of these institutions, dedicating herself fully to their growth and success.

He is partnered in his professional work by his 2 sons and 2 daughters-in-law, each a highly distinguished ophthalmologist with a distinct subspeciality.

Architect of Modern Ophthalmic Education

Every profession occasionally benefits from individuals who recognise that incremental improvement is insufficient. Instead, they undertake the more difficult task of redesigning the system itself. Dr. Grover's contribution to ophthalmic education belongs firmly within this category. During his long association with the All India Ophthalmological Society (AIOS), he recognised that postgraduate ophthalmic training across India exhibited considerable variability.

As Chairman of the Academic and Research Committee and later as President of AIOS, he became instrumental in developing what would become the country's most comprehensive residency curriculum in ophthalmology.[1] These initiatives established nationally accepted educational objectives and significantly strengthened postgraduate training across India.[2] Equally important was his commitment to understanding educational realities before proposing reform (Figure 10).

Recognising that meaningful change required evidence rather than opinion, he initiated one of the first comprehensive national surveys evaluating postgraduate ophthalmic education within Indian medical schools.[3] The findings helped define priorities for curriculum development, faculty training, infrastructure enhancement, and competency-based education.[4] This evidence-driven approach reflected an educator who understood that educational reform should be guided by scholarship rather than anecdote.

Dr A K Grover, has been engaged in ophthalmic education and academics for over 4 decades. He chairs three prestigious academic institutions involved in residency and post doctoral education in the capital New Delhi. He has been part of the curriculum committees of the Medical Council of India (MCI) and the National Board of Examinations (NBE).

Among Dr. Grover's most significant contributions to Indian ophthalmology was his instrumental role in creating the National Headquarters of the All India Ophthalmological Society (Figure 11).

At first glance, constructing an organisational headquarters might appear an administrative accomplishment. In reality, it represented something far more profound. Professional



Figure 10: At the helm of Indian ophthalmology - Dr Grover taking over as President, All India Ophthalmological Society, 2011.



Figure 11: A vision made tangible - the AIOS headquarters, built with Dr Grover's commitment to strengthening the profession.

organisations require continuity. Their institutional memory cannot depend upon changing office bearers. A permanent headquarters symbolises stability, scholarship, administrative efficiency, and professional identity. Through his vision and sustained leadership, the AIOS acquired precisely such a centre an enduring home for India's largest ophthalmic organisation and a tangible reminder that strong institutions constitute one of the profession's greatest assets.

His contribution therefore extended beyond educational philosophy. He helped build the physical and organisational infrastructure necessary to sustain educational excellence for decades to come.

A Global Vision for Ophthalmic Education

Dr. Grover's leadership within the International Council of Ophthalmology (ICO) and subsequently the Ophthalmology Foundation significantly expanded the scope of structured ophthalmic education worldwide.

As Chairman of the ICO Subspecialty Education Committee[5] working on ophthalmology education across the globe, he played a central role in introducing structured subspecialty examinations while simultaneously undertaking a worldwide survey examining the status of subspecialty education across diverse healthcare systems. He has been a regular participant in 'teaching the teachers' program of the ICO in various parts of the world. He has also served on the examinations committee of ICO for over a decade and its education and the accreditation committee. He is now serving on the advisory, examinations and accreditation committees of The Ophthalmology Foundation as well.

This work provided valuable insights into international educational standards and highlighted opportunities for harmonisation without compromising regional diversity.

The Global Thyroid Eye Disease Consensus Initiative

Perhaps no project better reflects Dr. Grover's capacity to build consensus than the recently completed WSOPRAS Global Consensus Statement on thyroid eye disease. The initiative brought together leading experts from across the world in a process involving nearly fifty detailed meetings over several years. Representatives from 3-4 member societies contributed comments and recommendations.

The objective was ambitious: to create practical guidance applicable across all healthcare environments—from basic-resource settings to the most advanced centres. The project demanded extraordinary collaboration, diplomacy, perseverance, and intellectual openness. Its successful completion and publication in Oculoplastic and Reconstructive Surgery (OPRS) - represents a landmark achievement for the specialty and a model of international academic cooperation (Figure 12).[6]

Scholarship Rooted in Clinical Practice

Although internationally celebrated as an oculoplastic surgeon and educator, his scholarly contributions reveal an equally impressive commitment to advancing ophthalmic science. His research has never been confined to a single domain. Instead,



Figure 12: Shaping global perspectives - Dr Grover at the creation of Global Consensus Statement on Thyroid Eye Disease, Istanbul, 2025. Bringing experience to a global consensus.

it spans oculoplastic surgery, congenital eyelid disorders,[7] ophthalmic trauma,[8,9] postgraduate education, curriculum development, residency training, surgical techniques, and professional education.

His scientific contributions include more than sixty peer-reviewed publications, over eighty textbook chapters, and five authoritative books that continue to serve as valuable resources for ophthalmologists across different stages of training. With more than seven hundred citations, his published work represents sustained scholarly engagement over several decades rather than isolated academic achievement.[5]

Yet the true significance of his research lies not in bibliometric indices. Its influence is evident in the way it has reshaped education, refined surgical techniques, and informed clinical decision-making.

Beyond his own extensive research contributions, Dr. Grover has also played an important role in shaping and advancing medical research at the national level. He has served as the member of the Scientific Advisory Committee and various project Review committees of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR). His academic stature and expertise have also owned him a place on the editorial boards of several prestigious international journals, reflecting the respect and definition he commands within the global ophthalmic and scientific community.

Innovation in Oculoplastic Surgery

Innovation occupies a unique position within surgery. Unlike technological invention, genuine surgical innovation frequently emerges from years of careful observation and incremental refinement.

Throughout his career, Dr. Grover has consistently exemplified this surgeon-scientist mindset. Several of his modifications in oculoplastic surgery have gained international recognition because they solved practical clinical problems encountered by surgeons worldwide.

Among these are his innovative approach to simultaneous levator excision and bilateral fascia lata sling surgery for Marcus Gunn jaw-winking ptosis, a technique that reduces the need for staged procedures while achieving highly reproducible functional outcomes.

Similarly, his refinements in transnasal wiring techniques for blepharophimosis syndrome improved both practicality and surgical effectiveness, addressing challenges that had limited wider adoption of previous methods.

His innovative modification of the Fasanella-Servat procedure, published early in his career, reflected an enduring characteristic that would define his subsequent work: thoughtful refinement rather than unnecessary complexity.[10]

During the years he pioneered oculoplastic surgery in India in the eighties, there was little or no availability of equipment and consumables. He used several innovative approaches to overcome the absence of lacrimal tubing, orbital floor implants, fascia lata harvesters and needles, finer suture materials and much more during the years.

Recognition Earned Through Service

The highest professional honours seldom recognise isolated achievements. Rather, they acknowledge sustained contributions that fundamentally influence a discipline. Dr. Grover's remarkable list of national and international recognitions reflects precisely such sustained excellence.

The *Padma Shri*, one of India's highest civilian honours, represents national recognition of decades devoted to medicine, education, research, and public service (Figure 13).[11]

Within ophthalmology, however, his influence has been acknowledged repeatedly through honours bestowed by colleagues who have directly witnessed his contributions.

Among these are the *Arthur Lim Award* and the *Distinguished Service Award* of the Asia-Pacific Academy of Ophthalmology, distinctions reserved for individuals whose leadership has significantly shaped ophthalmology within the Asia-Pacific region.



Figure 13: The nation's honour by the president of India, for a lifetime of service in healing and teaching: Padma shri Dr Ashok Kumar Grover.

Similarly, the highest honours of the Asia-Pacific Society of Ophthalmic Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery and the Asia-Pacific Ophthalmic Trauma Society recognise his transformative influence within subspecialty practice (Figure 14).[12]

International recognition has extended further through the award of *Honorary Fellowships* of the Royal College of Surgeons of Glasgow (FRCS Glasgow), the International Council of Ophthalmology (FICO), the Ophthalmology Foundation USA (FIOF), of the Collegium of AIOS (FAICO) and the International Medical Science Academy (FIMSA) - distinctions conferred upon ophthalmologists whose contributions have advanced the profession globally.
Within India, the prestigious *Col. Rangachari Award* of the All India Ophthalmological Society represents one of the highest recognitions bestowed upon an ophthalmologist for outstanding professional contribution.

Equally impressive is the distinction of having delivered more than fifty named orations, an honour reserved for those regarded as intellectual leaders whose careers provide enduring inspiration to the profession. Additionally, he has delivered more than 1600 national and international invited lectures, conducted instruction courses, carried out live surgeries at all forums across the world, in all 5 continents. He has organised highly acclaimed International and World Congresses as the principal organiser with great distinction. His continuing international influence was further recognised in 2023 and 2025 when he was named among the Asia-Pacific 100 Eyecon[13] and received the Asia-Pacific Academy of Ophthalmology (APAO) Senior Achievement Award in 2025. Lifetime achievement awards from Ifocus - most respected resident teaching program and from Indian Society of Cornea and Kerato Refractive Surgeons (ISCKRS) have followed.

Yet those familiar with Dr. Grover's career recognise that these honours represent milestones rather than motivations. Recognition has consistently followed service.
It has never preceded it.



Figure 14: APOTS 2023 and APSOPRS 2020: Honours, Orations and Keynote Lectures: Sharing expertise, Shaping the future, Taking Indian ophthalmic excellence to the global stage.

A Milestone of Trust: The Delhi Medical Council Election

Among the many recent milestones in Dr. Grover's distinguished professional journey, his election to the Delhi Medical Council stands apart as a deeply meaningful achievement. Supported wholeheartedly by colleagues, students, friends, and family members who worked tirelessly together, the election became more than a professional milestone it became a moving reflection of the affection, respect, and goodwill he had earned over decades of dedicated service to medicine.

Being elected as the *first ophthalmologist* in the history of the *Delhi Medical Council* was a significant honour and a moment of particular pride. Yet, beyond the distinction itself, it was the overwhelming trust and support of the medical



Figure 15: A moment of honour and gratitude - Dr Ashok Kumar Grover with Delhi Chief Minister Mrs Rekha Gupta following his historic victory in the Delhi Medical Council elections in 2026.

community that made the occasion truly special (Figure 15). For someone who has devoted much of his life to serving ophthalmology, educating generations of young doctors, and contributing to the wider medical profession, the affection demonstrated during the election carried a meaning perhaps greater than the honour of the position itself. It was a powerful reminder that professional legacy is ultimately measured not only by achievements and accolades, but by the relationships, trust, and goodwill one builds along the way.

In this sense, the election represented more than a new responsibility. It was a deeply personal affirmation of a career defined by service, integrity, mentorship, and the respect of generations of colleagues.

The Human Dimension of Excellence

Scientific achievements, institutional leadership, and academic distinction alone cannot fully explain why certain physicians become universally admired. The answer often lies within qualities that rarely appear on a curriculum vitae. Throughout conversations with colleagues across India and abroad, certain themes recur with remarkable consistency when discussing Dr. Grover.

Integrity. Kindness. Humility. Generosity. Accessibility. Professional dignity. Respect for colleagues. Uncompromising ethical standards.

These qualities have quietly shaped his reputation as much as his surgical accomplishments.

- His leadership has never relied upon authority.
- His teaching has never depended upon intimidation.
- His mentorship has never sought personal recognition.

Instead, he has consistently demonstrated that academic excellence and personal humility are not opposing virtues but complementary ones.

In an era where technological advancement frequently dominates professional discussion, Dr. Grover's career reminds us that medicine remains fundamentally a human endeavour.

- Patients remember compassion.
- Students remember encouragement.
- Colleagues remember fairness.
- Institutions remember integrity.

These enduring human qualities ultimately define professional greatness.

Dr. Sameer Sood, who currently heads multiple sharp sight centres across India and abroad, speaks with deep admiration of the extraordinary care and compassion that Dr. Grover has always shown towards his patients. For Dr. Grover, every patient is equally important irrespective of their social or financial background, or the hour at which they seek his help. He has always treated his patients with the same sincerity, patience, and dedication, never allowing circumstances to influence the quality of care he provides. What stands out most is the remarkable bond he shares with his patients. His ability to understand their fears, concerns, and emotions, and to respond with genuine empathy, has touched countless lives.

Dr. Sood also recalls another quality that reflects Dr. Grover's remarkable humility and commitment to people. He says that whenever Dr. Grover is invited to an event, he rarely refuses, no matter how demanding his schedule may be. He will always make every possible effort to be present, somehow finding the time and ensuring that he reaches the venue. This willingness to honour every invitation and be there for others, despite his busy schedule, speaks volumes about the respect and value he places on people and relationships.

For Dr. Sood, this rare combination of clinical excellence, compassion, humility, and an extraordinary human connect is what truly sets Dr. Grover apart not only as an exceptional doctor, but also as a deeply respected and cherished human being.

Family, Gratitude and Beyond

No account of Dr. Grover's life would be complete without acknowledging the central role of family. His marriage to Poonam has been a source of enduring strength and partnership for more than four decades. Together they built not merely institutions but a shared vision.

Their sons and daughters-in-law have carried forward the family's commitment to ophthalmology, creating a rare multi-generational professional legacy.

The arrival of a granddaughter has added yet another source of joy and fulfilment (Figure 16).

He is someone who truly loves life and embraces it with curiosity and enthusiasm. A keen follower of sports, he enjoys

cricket and playing badminton, while his intellectual interests extend to reading, particularly current affairs and recent history. In recent years, he has discovered another passion singing. He is especially fond of the golden era of Hindi film music and, in fact, would rarely operate without his favourite music playing softly in the background (Figure 17).

His love for travel is equally remarkable. Having visited more than 60 countries across different continents, he has explored some of the most extraordinary corners of the world, with the Arctic and Antarctica holding a special place in his travel memories. These varied interests, adventures and passions reflect the infectious zest with which he lives and, in many ways, are what keep his enthusiasm for life ever young (Figure 18).



Figure 16: Family - the heart behind the journey. Beyond the accolades and achievements, his greatest treasure is his family, his wife- Poonam, 2 sons – Apoorv and Tushar, 2 daughters-in-law Smita and Rwituja and a beloved granddaughter - Saira



Figure 17: Work hard, play hard - The lighter side of a legend - Dr Grover in his element.

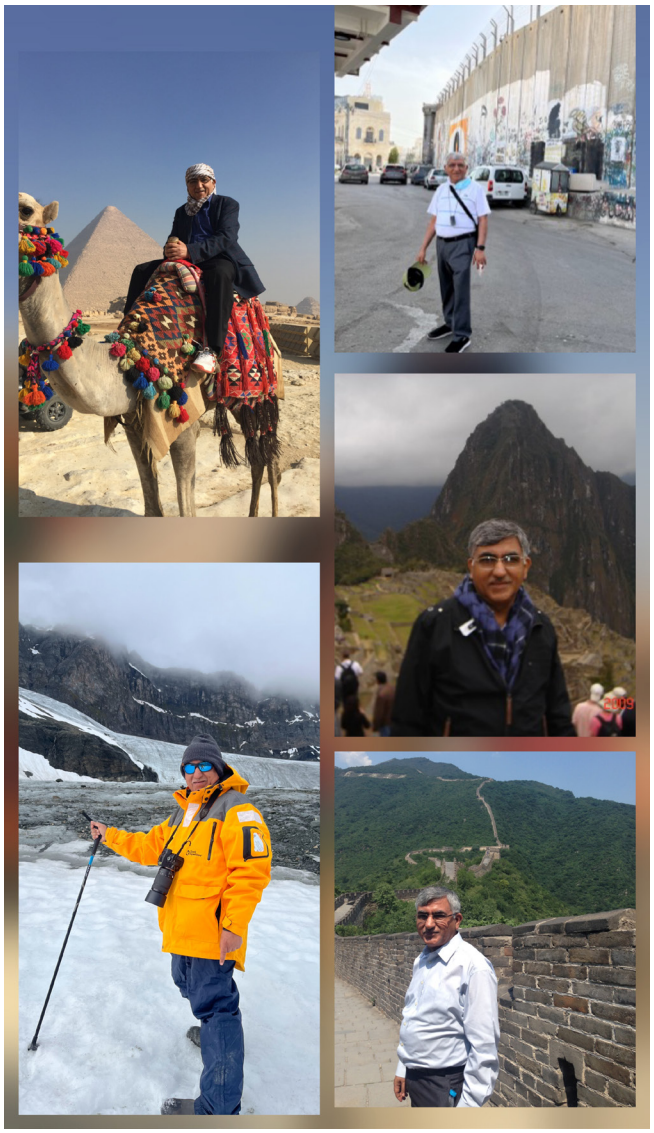

Figure 18: The world beyond ophthalmology - Embracing the world with the same curiosity and enthusiasm: Adventurous spirit of Doctor Grover filled with passion for travel and discovery.

Conclusion

Every generation of ophthalmologists is fortunate to witness the careers of a few extraordinary individuals whose influence extends well beyond their own lifetime.

Every career is ultimately measured not only by accomplishments but by impact.

Patients whose lives improved.

Students who were inspired.

Institutions that endure.

Ideas that continue to influence future generations.

Padma Shri Prof. Dr. Ashok Kumar Grover is unquestionably one such individual.

Yet perhaps the defining characteristic of his journey is a profound gratitude towards life and the world around him.

Gratitude towards teachers. Towards colleagues. Towards

students. Towards family. Towards patients. And towards the profession that gave meaning to his life.

Few reflections could summarise that journey better than his own simple observation:

"If I had the opportunity to live my life again, I would choose to be an ophthalmologist once more."

That statement reflects not merely professional success, but a life deeply fulfilled by service, learning, teaching, and the privilege of helping others see.

The legacy of Padma Shri Prof. Dr. Ashok Kumar Grover will continue to illuminate ophthalmology for decades to come. His influence lives not only within textbooks, scientific journals, operating theatres, and professional organisations but also within the thousands of ophthalmologists who continue to practice, teach, investigate, and lead according to the standards he so consistently exemplified.

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