

Padma Awards 2021: Few Doctors Honoured Despite Battling COVID-19

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Abstract

The Padma Awards are the highest civilian honours conferred by the Government of India. These prestigious awards include the Bharat Ratna, Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan, and Padma Shri. These are awarded across ten fields of human endeavour. It has been consistently observed that the number of awards given in Medicine is relatively low, compared to other fields like Arts or Literature. It was hoped that more doctors would be honoured this year, given the fact that they have been fighting the COVID-19 pandemic from the forefront since the beginning, with more than 500 doctors losing their lives in the line of duty. This article attempts to analyse the underlying reason why doctors receive comparatively less recognition than other professions.

Introduction

The Padma Awards are one of the highest honours conferred to Indian civilians, although in exceptional cases, foreign nationals have also been conferred these awards. The names of the awardees are declared annually on 25 January, prior to the Republic Day celebrations. There are four categories of awards, namely, Bharat Ratna (highest honour), Padma Vibhushan (second-highest), Padma Bhushan (third-highest), and Padma Shri (fourth-highest). These awards are conferred to exceptional individuals who have excelled in their respective fields, with an element of public service.

All persons, irrespective of race, social standing, occupation, or gender are eligible for these awards. However, government employees, except for doctors and scientists, are ineligible. A maximum number of 120 awards can be conferred each year (excluding posthumous and foreign awards). These

awards do not confer a title and cannot be used as a suffix or prefix to the awardees' name.

A specially constituted Padma Awards Committee is formed each year by the Prime Minister of India. This committee screens the nominations and makes recommendations to the President of India.

Around March or April, these awards are bestowed upon the awardees by the President of India at a special ceremony held at the Rashtrapati Bhawan, New Delhi. This year, a total of 119 Padma Awards were conferred by the President, including seven Padma Vibhushan, ten Padma Bhushan, and 102 Padma Shri awards. These awardees included 29 women, ten foreign nationals, and one transgender. Sixteen people were awarded posthumously.

Genesis of the Padma Awards [1]

The conferment of the Padma Awards started in

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1954. In the beginning, only two civilian awards were instituted by the Indian Government. These included the Bharat Ratna and Padma Vibhushan. From the following year, two other categories were introduced, namely, Padma Bhushan and Padma Shri. Although the awards are conferred every year, they were not awarded in 1978, 1979, and between 1993-1997.

Categories of Awards [1]

- **Bharat Ratna:** The Bharat Ratna is an exceptional award, which stands out from the rest. It is the top civilian award in India. It is awarded in recognition of exemplary service or performance in any field of human endeavour. In the case of this award, no formal recommendations are required. The Prime Minister makes the recommendation to the President of India. A maximum of 3 Bharat Ratna awards can be awarded in a particular year. Since its inception, the Government of India has conferred this award on 45 exceptionally outstanding individuals.
- **Padma Vibhushan:** This is the second-highest civilian award in India. It is awarded for exceptional and distinguished service.
- **Padma Bhushan:** This is the third-highest civilian award in India. It is awarded for distinguished service of a high order.
- **Padma Shri:** This is the fourth-highest civilian award in India. It is awarded for distinguished service.

Fields in which Padma Awards are Conferred [1]

The Padma Awards are conferred in a total of ten fields of human endeavour, which are briefly highlighted below:

- **Art:** This encompasses the fields of music, painting, sculpture, photography, cinematography, and theatre.
- **Social Work:** This encompasses social service, charitable service, and community service, among others.
- **Public Affairs:** This encompasses law, public life, and politics, among others.
- **Science & Engineering:** This encompasses space engineering, nuclear science,

information technology, and R&D in science and its allied areas.

- **Trade & Industry:** This encompasses the areas of banking, economic activities, management, tourism, and business.
- **Medicine:** This includes medical research in the areas of Allopathy and the traditional systems of Medicine, namely, Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homoeopathy (AYUSH).
- **Literature & Education:** This includes the areas of literature, poetry, teaching, journalism, book composing, promotion of education, promotion of literacy, and educational reforms.
- **Civil Service:** This includes government servants who demonstrate excellence and distinction in civil service.
- **Sports:** This includes athletics, adventure sports, mountaineering, promotion of sports, and yoga.
- **Others:** This includes all fields that are not covered above and may include areas such as propagation of Indian culture, protection of human rights, wildlife protection/conservation, spiritualism/religion, archeology, grassroots innovation, and agriculture, among others.

The total number of Padma Awards that have been conferred in all the above categories in 2021 are presented in Figure 1.

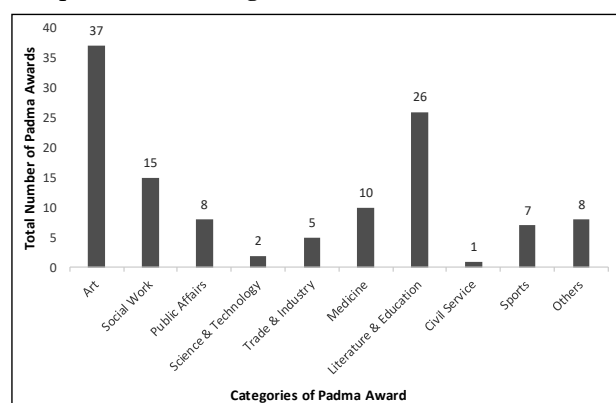


Figure 1: Total Number of Padma Awards in All Categories for 2021

Figure 1 clearly shows that the Art and Literature & Education categories have bagged by far the highest number of awards. In comparison, Medicine

has received less than half this number. The break-up of the awards into the three categories i.e.,

Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan, and Padma Shri has been presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Padma Awards in All Categories for 2021

Categories	Padma Vibhushan	Padma Bhushan	Padma Shri
Art	2	1	34
Social Work	0	0	15
Public Affairs	1	5	2
Science & Technology	1	0	1
Trade & Industry	0	1	4
Medicine	1	0	9
Literature & Education	0	1	25
Civil Service	0	1	0
Sports	0	0	7
Others	2	1	5

Table 2 shows that there are a greater number of awards in the category of Padma Shri (102 awards) than in the case of Padma Bhushan (10 awards), and Padma Vibhushan (7 awards). This complies with the general trend that is observed in the case of the Padma Awards. Notably, this

year, the category of Medicine has received just ten awards, with nine Padma Shri's and one Padma Vibhushan. No Padma Bhushan award was conferred in Medicine this year. The details of this year's ten Padma awardees in Medicine are presented in Table 2 [2].

Table 2: Padma Awardees in Medicine for 2021

Category of Award	Name of Awardee	State	Contribution of Awardee
Padma Vibhushan	Dr. Belle Monappa Hegde	Karnataka	Dr. Hegde is a renowned cardiologist and medical educationist. Aged 82, he is well-known for his holistic approach to treatment, combining modern medicine (Allopathy) with traditional systems of medicine, including Ayurveda.
Padma Shri	Dr. Rattan Lal Mittal	Punjab	Dr. Mittal is a former Professor and Head of the Department of Orthopaedics, Government Medical College, Patiala. He has made remarkable contributions in performing rare clubfoot surgeries free-of-cost. He has devoted over six decades to treating this severe foot deformity, which is prevalent in low- and middle-income countries, like India.
	Dr. Chandrakant Sambhaji Pandav	Delhi	Dr. Pandav is a former Professor and Head of the Centre for Community Medicine at AIIMS, New Delhi. He is currently a Member of the National Council for India Nutritional Challenges under <i>POSHAN Abhiyaan</i> . He has made notable contributions in the area of iodine deficiency.

Category of Award	Name of Awardee	State	Contribution of Awardee
	Dr. J. N. Pande (Posthumous)	Delhi	Dr. Pande was an eminent Pulmonologist and Head of the Department of Medicine at AIIMS, New Delhi. Dr. Pande died aged 79 in May 2020 due to COVID-19. He was the epitome of the coexistence of knowledge and humility. He has made seminal research contributions in the area of respiratory medicine.
	Dr. Krishna Mohan Pathi	Odisha	Dr. Pathi is an orthopedic surgeon, known for his pioneering work in tribal districts of Odisha. Notably, he provides free treatment to poor patients regularly at a village in Ganjam district. Besides his medical service, he has also contributed to the area of education.
	Dr. Dhananjay Diwakar Sagdeo	Kerala	Dr. Sagdeo has provided selfless medical service in the tribal areas in and around Wayanad. Importantly, he was the first to detect sickle cell anaemia among tribal populations in Wayanad.
	Shri. Ashok Kumar Sahu	Uttar Pradesh	Shri. Sahu, from Kanpur, has made important contributions in the area of rehabilitation of youths suffering from depression. He has founded the <i>Dhamma Kalyan Kanpur International Vipassana Sadhana Kendra</i> in 2012 for propagating spirituality and peace of mind. All services at his <i>Sadhana Kendra</i> are free-of-cost.
	Dr. Bhupendra Kumar Singh Sanjay	Uttarakhand	Dr. Sanjay is a world-renowned orthopaedic surgeon, who has been mentioned in the Limca and Guinness Book of World Records for his excellent achievements and contributions in the area of surgery.
	Dr. Dilip Kumar Singh	Bihar	Dr. Singh, who is now 92 years old, is a unique general physician who still practices regularly. He is well known for his dedication and empathy towards his patients. His uniqueness lies in the fact that unlike other doctors, he doesn't prescribe medicines, but distributes them directly in the old-fashioned way in the form of " <i>Pudiyas</i> ". He has also contributed immensely in the area of polio treatment.

Category of Award	Name of Awardee	State	Contribution of Awardee
	Dr. Thiruvengadam Veeraraghavan (Posthumous)	Tamil Nadu	Dr. Veeraraghavan was popularly known as the “2-rupee doctor”. He passed away in August 2020 at the age of 70. He had devoted his life to serving the people of north Chennai. Hailing from a humble background himself, he will be fondly remembered for his untiring efforts for the betterment of the lives of the poor and downtrodden.

The trend of the total number of Padma Awards in the category of Medicine over the past decade (2012-2021) is presented in Figure 2 [3].

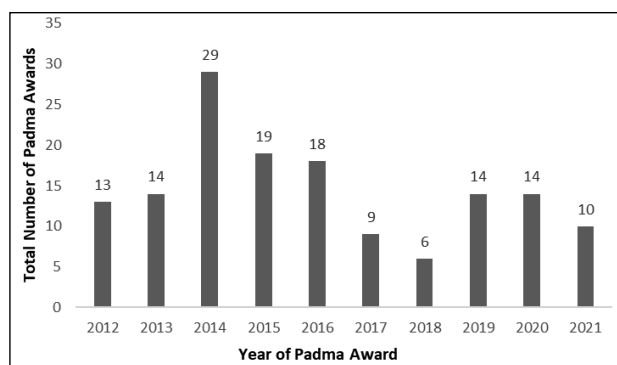


Figure 2: Total Number of Padma Awards in Medicine in the Past 10 Years (2012-2021)

Table 3: Padma Awards in Medicine in Past 10 Years (2012-2021)

Year	Padma Vibhushan	Padma Bhushan	Padma Shri
2012	1	3	9
2013	0	1	13
2014	0	1	28
2015	2	0	17
2016	1	1	16
2017	0	1	8
2018	0	0	6
2019	0	1	13
2020	0	1	13
2021	1	0	9

Why is the Field of Medicine Under-represented in the Padma Awards?

Based on the foregoing discussion, it is evident that the field of Medicine has been consistently underrepresented in the Padma Awards, compared to the Arts or Literature. Even the legendary Indian doctor, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, didn't

Figure 2 reveals some interesting data on the trend of Padma Awards in Medicine over the years. The data are rather depressing as the average number of awards in Medicine over the past decade is just 14.6. Looking at the break-up of the awards according to category (Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan, and Padma Shri) presented in Table 3 [3], it is clear that the data conform to the general trend followed in case of the other fields in which the awards are conferred (Table 1).

receive the Bharat Ratna in Medicine (he received the award in Public Affairs), even though he was equally proficient in Medicine and Surgery, which is very rare indeed. This is evident from the fact that he was both an MRCP and an FRCS, which are two of the most coveted British degrees in Medicine and Surgery, respectively. Hence, the

question naturally arises why the field of Medicine has been consistently under-recognized by the Padma Awards. If we reflect, we might realize that this could arise from the fact that the various fields of human endeavour have a different impact on the minds or psyche of people. In the case of the Arts or Literature or other cultural fields, we are uplifted from a state of normalcy to a higher level of contentment. However, in the case of Medicine, we are elevated from a low physical or mental state of health to a state of normalcy. Hence, in this case, the uplifting effect is not so pronounced as in the case of the former and therefore doesn't leave an indelible mark in the minds of people. Therefore, this could influence the skewed choices during the selection of the awardees as, after all, it is humans who make these choices.

Conclusion

The trend in the Padma Awards in the area of Medicine so far has been consistently dismal. But so far, the times have been normal. But now, these are not normal times, considering the havoc being wreaked across the globe by the COVID-19 pandemic. Already, as of 30.05.2021, 3.5 million lives have been claimed by this unprecedented calamity, which has not even spared doctors. As

per the Indian Medical Association (IMA) data, at least 515 Indian doctors have died from COVID-19 [4]. Therefore, in these times of human turmoil and devastation, it is saddening that despite battling the pandemic from the forefront, doctors have not received their due share of honour and recognition that they undoubtedly deserved.

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