

# Renowned Nilgiris dentist Tarun Chhabra to retire from practice today

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UDHAGAMANDALAM

After almost four decades, residents of the Nilgiris needing a dentist will no longer be able to rely on the steady hands of Tarun Chhabra.

The dentist, renowned in the Nilgiris for his long-standing ties to the district, and over the years has become renowned as an expert on the indigenous Toda culture and local ecology will stop practising dentistry Saturday.

Dr. Chhabra is the son of another famed dentist, Lieutenant Colonel T.S.Chhabra, who set up his practice in Coonoor and later moved to Udhagamandalam.

Dr. Chhabra, who started his practice in 1970 at the age of 22, has for years become renowned for his dedication to his patients, with him holding free medical camps every Friday for the last 32 years.

“Based on my conservative estimation, I think



Dr. Tarun Chhabra attending to a patient at his clinic in Udhagamandalam.

M. SATHYAMOORTHY

around 55,000 patients have benefitted through the initiative,” said Dr. Chhabra, who has not only performed dental procedures for free during the medical camps, but also gave away free medicines to patients.

Some of his patients travel from as far away as Mettupalayam for treatment, said Dr. Chhabra, as he bade farewell to his final

few patients, many of whom were visibly saddened to hear the news of his retirement.

Over the years, Dr. Chhabra has also become renowned as one of the Nilgiris’ foremost authorities on the Todas, an indigenous community from the Nilgiris and is widely regarded as one of the most important documentarians of their culture through his book “The Toda Landscape: Explorations in Cultural Ecology.”

Through his work with the Todas, Dr. Chhabra also learned of their close ties to the endemic flora and fauna of the Nilgiris, and over the years discovered three new species of endemic balsams (*Impatiens kawtityana*, *Impatiens taihmushkulni* and *Impatiens nilgirica*) naming them with Toda-related nomenclature in the process. He is also credited with discovering a rare species of cobra lily endemic to the Nilgiris after more than 84-years.

Dr. Chhabra admitted on Friday that retirement will be difficult, but that he plans on devoting the rest of his life on serving the local community even more than during his days as a practising dentist.

Apart from his work with the Edhkwelynawd Botanical Refuge, where he is restoring more than 25 acres of grassland using native ecology, and with the Toda Nalavaazhvu Sangam, of which he is the only non-Toda trustee, Dr. Chhabra plans to spend his time after retirement establishing the Nilgiris kutawddy center in Elk Hill, where he plans on supporting the education of poor children, offer free medical camps, organise cultural workshops for advisis to learn about their culture and hold lectures on ecology.

“This will be completely funded by me, and I plan to liquidate all my assets and investments in setting this up,” he told *The Hindu*.