

OBITUARY

DR VINOD PRAKASH SHARMA

Ninth October 2015 was a very sad day for National Institute of Malaria Research, when the news of passing away of its founder Director was received. Born on 6th April 1938, in Bulandshahar in Uttar Pradesh, Dr VP Sharma, obtained his Masters in 1960, Ph.D. in 1964 and D.Sc. degree in 1979 from Allahabad University. He also worked at the Notre Dame and Purdue University in USA from 1965–1968.

After returning from abroad, Dr Sharma joined Forest Research Institute, Dehradun as Pool Officer in 1969. From 1970–1975, he worked as a senior scientist in World Health Organization/Indian Council of Medical Research project on Genetic Control of Mosquito's Unit at New Delhi. After the bifurcation of GCMU, Dr Sharma joined the then Malaria Research Centre (now NIMR) under ICMR in 1978 as Deputy Director and rose to the post of Director in 1982 where he continued till superannuation in 1998. For a brief period, Dr Sharma also served as Additional Director General of ICMR in 1998.

Dr Sharma realized that without field work, the dynamics of malaria can not be understood and neither the disease can be controlled; therefore, he set up the Integrated Disease Vector Control project under the aegis of Science & Technology Mission mode project envisioned by the then Prime Minister of India, in 1986 at 13 sites in the country and demonstrated control of malaria in different eco-epidemiological paradigms through environment friendly approach. He brought together various sectors like agriculture, irrigation, fishery, rural development, engineering, forestry, urban, socioeconomics, audiovisual and mass media *etc.* and established the usefulness of Information, Education and Communication. He flagged the issue of true malaria burden in the country in 1983 and finally his publication in the *Lancet* in 2010 led to the setting up of a multicentric study to estimate malaria burden in the country.

Dr Sharma was a voracious reader and writer and used to send latest updates in the field of malaria to his colleagues. Always in quest for implementing new ideas for malaria control, Dr Sharma pioneered in evaluation of insecticide treated nets for personal protection from mosquitoes in the country, development of expanded polystyrene beads from thermocole as a physical barrier in water bodies for preventing egg laying by mosquitoes, use of neem oil for prevention of mosquito bites and sandflies, application of satellite remote sensing and GIS for micro-stratification, demonstration of usefulness of biolarvicides and larvivorous fish in vector control, evaluation of alpha beta arteether, clinical trial leading to development of anti-relapse drug, Bulaquine *etc.* The National programme has adopted most of the tools for vector control evaluated and



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developed under the regime of Dr Sharma.

Dr Sharma worked for many international organizations like Panel of Experts on Environmental Management (PEEM), WHO and Global Fund *etc.* as consultant/advisor. It was only Dr Sharma who revived the *Indian Journal of Malariology* in 1981 (now renamed as *Journal of Vector Borne Diseases*).

For his contribution in science, over 20 awards have been conferred on him. His idea of bioenvironmental approach for malaria control

was recognized by the Centre for Science & Environment by honouring him with Green Scientist Award in 2001. The Government of India honoured Dr Sharma with *Padma Shri* in 1992 and *Padma Bhushan* in 2014. World Health Assembly bestowed him with 'Darling Foundation Prize' in 1999.

Dr Sharma always acted like a young energetic scientist and preferred to write notes, letters, and research papers with his pen instead of giving dictation. After superannuation only, he developed computer skills. His ideas changed with time and outreached malaria or vector borne diseases. He developed interest in climate change, environment, safe water for Community Health, Women & Development, and Nature at work and energy *etc.* as evidenced by publication of his five Books on diverse subjects. As a nationalist, he contributed two books on Malaria and Dengue in Hindi language. Fellow of three most distinguished Academies of India, Dr Sharma kept himself busy in various educational activities of National Academy of Sciences India, Allahabad; edited *Journal of Parasitic Diseases* and served as distinguished Professor at Centre for Rural Development and Technology at IIT, New Delhi.

Dr Sharma is survived by his wife, Dr Manju Sharma, Former Secretary, Department of Biotechnology, Govt. of India, a distinguished biologist showcasing women scientists in India; son, Dr Amit Sharma, an established scientist at International Centre for Genetic Engineering & Biotechnology; daughter-in-law, Divyani and two grand children.

With the demise of Dr Sharma, India has lost a hard taskmaster, globally renowned public health scientist and will be remembered as a 'malaria-man'. NIMR has lost its founder Director who nurtured the institute to its international level, and worked till his last breath. Dr VP Sharma's personality would continue to inspire malariologists, public health entomologists and young generations for decades to come.

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Scientist 'G'

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