



Scientists' Bio-bibliography

IN MEMORIAM DR V.P. SHARMA

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Date of submission : 17th Oct., 2021

Date of revision : 19th Nov., 2021

Date of acceptance : 24th Nov., 2021

*“Who comprehends his trust, and to the
same*

*Keeps faithful with a singleness of aim;
And therefore does not stoop, nor lie in
wait*

*For wealth, or honour, or for worldly
state;*

*Whom they must follow, on whose head
must fall,*

*Like showers of manna, if they come at
all.”*

— William Wordsworth

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Cite this article as:

Singh Himmat, Sharma RS, Kirti Jagbir Singh, Tyagi BK. In memoriam Dr V.P. Sharma. J Med Arthropodol & Public Health. 2021; 1(2):43-71

BIOGRAPHY

The life of Professor Dr Ved Prakash Sharma, an utterly indefatigable malaria research genius *nonpareil*, truly reflects the spirit radiated from these famous lines by William Wordsworth. Dr Sharma, more adorably known in close scientific circles worldwide as ‘VP’ or ‘VPS’, was one of those rare scientists who by their energetic character not only practice educate the budding researchers in habits of industry, but by the example of diligence and perseverance which they set before them, largely influence the scientific activity in all directions and contribute in a great degree to form the national character. The national progress, it is aptly said, is after all the sum of individual industry, energy and uprightness and Dr Sharma was a glorious example of focused malariological research for the entire scientific fraternity in our own lifetime (Tyagi & Singh, 2016). In recognition of his lifelong and unparalleled malaria control efforts in India, the Government of India felt itself honoured in having bestowed upon him one of the highest civilian awards of the country, the “*Padma Bhushan*” (Dhiman, 2018).



Fig. 1. Dr V.P. Sharma, as the first Director, ICMR-Malaria Research Centre, Delhi

Dr Sharma was unquestionably the greatest malariologist and medical entomologist in the independent India, standing tall in the same extraordinary league of great malariologists as Sir Dr Ronald Ross, Sir Dr S.R. Christophers, Dr McDonald, Dr T.R. Rao and Dr C.F. Curtis, just a few of them for example, who convincingly practiced ‘Gandhian Philosophy’ in controlling malaria in India by means of indigenous methods without harming the environment. An astute administrator and a scientist of international repute, he endlessly pursued his goal to eliminate malaria from India through integrated vector control approach.

Born on April 6, 1938, in Bulandshahr district of Uttar Pradesh in India, Dr Sharma did his early education at his native place. He subsequently joined Allahabad University from where he secured M.Sc. in 1960 and D.Phil. in 1964. In

1965, he left to South Bend, Indiana, USA and joined the University of Notre Dame as a postdoctoral research associate in the laboratory of another Indian great, Prof Karamjit Singh Rai. He later shifted to Purdue University, USA. Sharma returned to India in 1968 and again joined Allahabad University to complete his D.Sc., albeit much later in 1979.

Meanwhile, Dr Sharma started his career at the world famous Forest Research Institute, Dehradun, as a Pool Officer in the Entomology Branch headed by Dr. P.K. Sen-Sarma, another great entomologist of India in 1969. An year later, in 1970, he joined the WHO sponsored project under the aegis of Indian Council of Medical Research, as a Senior Scientist on Genetic Control of *Culex quinquefasciatus* mosquito, where he worked till 1975. When this project was abruptly aborted, he joined ICMR's newly established Vector Control Research Centre at Delhi and sooner the newly founded Malaria Research Centre (MRC, which has been recently rechristened as National Institute of Malaria Research) in 1976, as Deputy Director & Officer in-Charge. He became the first Director of the MRC, a post from where he retired in 1998, with a lofty decoration of Additional Director General of Indian Council of Medical Research (Fig. 1).



Fig. 2. Dr V.P. Sharma (1938-2015), receiving Gujar Mal Modi Award for Innovative Science & Technology, 2013.

With over forty years of research and field experience, Dr V.P. Sharma was considered an authority on malaria and vector biology. He has been credited with many scientific and research achievements. His studies on the chemo- and radio-sterilization of male mosquitoes are well documented. He is credited with developing a new technique for sex separation of mosquitoes. He is also acknowledged for his contributions to vector biology, especially anophelines. A versatile orator and writer (>400 scientific papers in reputed national and international journals such as, for example, *Nature*, about two dozen books, both in Hindi and English), he also extensively contributed to the popularization of science, through his books, journals and education programs, TV and radio talks. Possibly his greatest contribution has been the unflinching demonstration of bio-environmental malaria control through eco-friendly, community driven and economically feasible indigenous methodology. It was he who conceptualized a novel bioenvironmental malaria control strategy as an alternative to spraying chemicals and successfully demonstrated malaria control in various eco-epidemiological settings in the country. As a result of his indefatigable efforts, today we have technologies to fight malaria which are environmentally safe, cost effective, produce sustainable impact on the society and are free from ecological hazards that are often associated with DDT and other insecticides used in vector-borne disease control programmes.

Dr Sharma held many international positions of importance, such as the Chairman of the WHO's Roll Back Malaria initiative and Member, WHO Expert Committee on Malaria. Dr Sharma was a fellow of all the three prominent Indian science academies, i.e., Indian National Science Academy, New Delhi; Indian Academy of Sciences, Bangalore; National Academy of Sciences, India (Allahabad), besides several other learned national as well as international societies such as Royal Asiatic Society, Entomology Society of India, New Delhi, Fellow of National Environmental Science Academy, New Delhi, Fellow of Indian Society for Parasitology, Fellow of Indian Society of Malaria and other communicable diseases and Zoological Society of India. He was revered by one and all for his authenticity and clarity of mind, and therefore also acted as the President of some of the prestigious associations like National Academy of Vector borne Diseases and National Academy of Sciences (India) Allahabad.

Dr Sharma dominated the malariological researches in India for more than three decades so much so that he was crowned with numerous and the most

prestigious honours and awards that any other contemporary scientist in the field of vector-borne diseases can hardly imagine of; Padma Bhushan, Gujar Mal Modi Award, Meghnad Saha Distinguished Fellowship, Padma Shri, WHO Darling Foundation Prize, Government of India Inventions Award, Chancellor's Prize, Dr M.O.T. Aiyengar Memorial Award, B.R. Ambedkar Centenary Award, Om Prakash Bhasin Award, Ranbaxy Award, M.L. Gupta Trust Award, FICCI Cash Award, Vaswik Award, Green Scientist Award, Best Scientist Award, G. P. Chatterjee Memorial Award, Dr R.V. Rajaram Oration Award, Dr U.S. Srivastava Memorial Lecture Award, Professor L.S. Ramaswami Memorial Oration Award, Life Time Achievement Award by the Indian Society of Malaria and other Communicable Diseases, B.N. Singh Oration Award, B.K. Srivastava Oration Award, Distinguished Parasitologist of World Parasitologist Federation (WPF), Gold Medal for lifetime Achievement Award of Indian Academy of Environmental Sciences (Fig. 2).

He was an extraordinary scientist and would think not an iota less than perfection in all his undertakings. Dr Sharma was active till his last day taking care of his duties as the Meghnad Saha Distinguished Professor at the Centre for Rural Development and Technology, Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi. He was also spearheading the "Safe Water" campaign of the National Academy of Sciences, India launched during the Year of Science (1987). His work on popularization of science, creating awareness and science education programmes of National Academy of Sciences, India are widely appreciated globally.

An unparalleled organizer of scientific conferences and symposia, he was the main architect behind organizing the international conference in the memory of the Nobel Laureate Dr Ronald Ross's pathbreaking discovery of malaria-mosquito connection in 1897 while posted in Secunderabad, India and celebrated 100 years of the glorious discovery.

Dr V.P. Sharma will be always remembered for his innovativeness, liking for indigenous methodologies and emphasis on involving community participation at all steps of translational malaria research so as to reduce the gap between research and their end-users!

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