

## Madhava Rao Sirsi – An obituary

Madhava Rao Sirsi, who expired on 27 January 1999, was born in Shimoga, Karnataka State on 24 April 1911. His early education was in Shimoga after which he joined Mysore Medical College from where he obtained an MBBS degree in 1939. He also obtained an LTM from the Tropical School of Medicine, Calcutta and joined the Bowring Hospital, Bangalore as a pathologist.

In 1949 Sirsi joined the then Pharmacology Laboratory of the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore which was headed at that time by N. N. De. In 1951 he obtained a fellowship to visit hospitals in Vienna and a few other European countries for three months.

In 1952 when De left for Lucknow to join the Central Drug Research Institute, Sirsi who was promoted that year from Lecturer to Assistant Professor, took over charge of the Pharmacology Laboratory. He rose to be a full Professor in 1964 and trained a large number of Ph D students.

Sirsi, by all accounts, was a gentle doctor, or rather, a doctor's doctor. He in fact, may be one of the early physician researchers of the country who paid attention to basic medical biology. He was the first to have demonstrated the antifertility action of neem oil. His early work on malaria envisaged growing the malarial parasite in short-term culture. However, the advent of DDT more or less killed his malarial work. He then shifted his attention to tuberculosis and

cancer. In the area of tuberculosis he started work on culturing mycobacteria *in vitro* and in experimental mice and guinea pigs in order to test synthetic and naturally occurring compounds for anti-tubercular activity. He was in charge of the Animal House of the Pharmacology Laboratory and was the first Chairman of the Central Animal Facility of the Indian Institute of Science when it was established in 1971.



In the area of cancer, Sirsi's attention was on native carcinogenic substances and looked for the carcinogenic activity of kerosene tar, tobacco and betel nut. He is also one of the early immunologists of the country and the first one in the Institute to work on drug-DNA interactions.

When the Laboratories of Pharmacology and Fermentation Technology were amalgamated in 1968 to form the Microbiology and Pharmacology Laboratory, J. V. Bhat who had been in charge of Fermentation Technology Labora-

tory, and Sirsi took turns for two years each as Chairman of the new set up. In 1972 both of them retired from service. Sirsi continued for another five years as Emeritus Professor.

In addition to his association with the Indian Institute of Science, Sirsi was for a time editor of *Current Science* (1973-74) and founder editor of *Mysore Medical Association Journal*. As a member of the Mysore Medical Education Society, he was one of those responsible for founding the Bangalore Medical College. The then Government of Mysore made available to the Society in 1956 a piece of land adjacent to Vani Vilas Hospital to build the college, which was subsequently taken over by the Government.

Sirsi was also the President of the Karnataka Cancer Society from 1976 to 1979. He leaves behind his wife Suvarna, whom he married in 1932, two sons and four grandchildren to mourn his loss.

Sirsi was very popular among his colleagues, his students and the supporting staff at the Indian Institute of Science and he spared no effort to help them in every way under his control at all times.

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