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AMIYA BHUSON KAR

(1918 - 1976)

Elected Fellow 1969

BIRTH, PARENTAGE AND EDUCATION

AMIYA BHUSON KAR, born on May 6, 1918 in Calcutta, was the second child of late Shri Abani Bhuson Kar and late Smt Prabhabati Kar. His father, a leading advocate at Alipore Criminal Court, Calcutta, had a profound influence in shaping Amiya Bhuson's career. After his school education in Mitra Institution at Bhowanipur, Calcutta he joined the Presidency College, Calcutta from where he obtained his MSc degree in Zoology in 1940. Kar had a brilliant educational career. For securing first position in the first class in BSc (Hons) examination in 1938, he was awarded the Jubilee Scholars ship and for MSc a gold medal by the Calcutta University.

Amiya Bhuson was appointed as a lecturer in Bethune College, Calcutta in 1940. In 1944, he was awarded the Sir Rashbehary Ghosh Fellowship of the University of Calcutta for higher studies in UK. He worked with Professor A W Greenwood at the Institute of Animal Genetics, Edinburgh University, Edinburgh, UK, from where he obtained his PhD degree in 1946. He then worked as a Resident Doctor at the Department of Poultry Husbandry, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, USA for one year (1946-1947). Dr Kar returned to India in late 1947 and joined St Xavier's College, Calcutta as Professor of Biology and Honorary Lecturer in Zoology, University of Cal-In 1949, he joined the Central Drugs Laboratory of the Government of India at Calcutta as a Senior Research Fellow of the National Institute of Sciences of India (1949-52). In 1955, Dr Kar went back to England as a Colombo Plan Fellow and worked at the Department of Anatomy, University of Birmingham (1955), Atomic Energy Research Establishment, Harwell (1956) and the Medical Research Council, Radiotherapy Research Unit, and the Hammersmith Hospital, London (1956).

RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

Dr Kar joined the Central Drug Research Institute, Lucknow in 1952 and after serving in various positions was made Eminent Scientist of the CSIR in 1974. The research on development of contraceptives and reproductive biology started with Dr Kar. He was the first head of the Institute's Division

of Endocrinology, which soon developed into a very active school of research in this area and received both national and international recognition.

His research from 1947 to 1951 dealt with the effects of steroids (androgens, estrogens, progestogens and corticoids) on the reproductive process in experimental animals (particularly birds) and showed their antiovulatory and antispermatogenic properties. His records show that he initiated these studies as early as 1944 when research in the area of fertility regulation was almost His studies from 1954 to 1956 demonstrated the mode of action and contraceptive efficacy of 19- norsteroids in animals independently but almost simultaneously with Dr Gregory Pincus in USA. Dr Kar together with his associates then conducted exhaustive studies on the effect of Enovid, the first oral contraceptive, on the physiology and biochemistry of the genital and endocrine organs of rhesus monkeys from birth to sexual maturity, and were able to show the absence of any adverse influence of this contraceptive. They later on demonstrated that the chemical structure of progestational steroids was an important determinant of their modus operandi, whether at the hypothalamopituitary or peripheral level. Dr Kar and his colleagues also studied the effect of these steroids, particularly progestogens on male fertility and showed that none of them caused selective arrest of spermatogenesis without inhibiting endocrine function.

Dr Kar was one of the first to investigate the effect of heavy metals (in the late fifties), particularly of cadmium, on reproduction. His studies showed the importance of ionic homeostasis in the maintenance of normal reproductive functions. The practical application of these studies was the development of a simple, inexpensive and bloodless method of sterilisation of scrub cattle by intra-ovarian injection of cadmium chloride. In recognition of his contributions in this field, Dr Kar was invited by the University of Montreal, Canada in 1967 as Claude Bernard Visiting Professor in Experimental Medicine to deliver lectures on the role of metallic ions in reproduction, an assignment, which due to pressure of work he could not fulfil.

From 1960, Dr Kar and his associates conducted extensive experimental and clinical studies on intrauterine contraceptive devices (IUD), with particular emphasis on their long-term effects on the physiology and biochemistry of the genital organs and on the management of IUD-associated bleeding episodes with haemostatics, anti-inflammatory and anti-histaminic agents and progestogens. The pioneering studies of his group on intravas deferens device in 1964 and intra-fallopian tube device in 1966 stimulated wide interest in such devices and subsequent research on vas occlusion techniques with silastic and other polymers was a direct result of this interest generated. For his contributions in the field of IUD he was invited to speak, at the Internation Conference on Intrauterine Contraception in 1964, organized by

Population Council, New York, USA; on The Mechanism of action of IUDs at the 8th International Conference on Planned Parenthood, Santiago, Chile in 1967; on 'The Effect of IUDs on Implantation' at the National Institute of Health, USA. Conference on Biological Effects of IUD, Bethesda, USA in 1967, and was elected Vice-Chairman, World Health Organization Scientific Group Meeting on IUD, Geneva in 1968.

In 1963, Dr Kar and his group became interested in the development of nonsteroidal post-coital contraceptives for the female. These efforts resulted in the discovery of anti implantation activity in a variety of chemical structures, notably 2, 3-diphenyl-benzofurans, 2, 3-diphenyl-naphthofurans and 3, 4-diphenyl-chromans; one of the active compounds of latter group, named Centchroman is currently under multicentric clinical trial as a weekly contraceptive pill. Dr Kar's contribution in this field was recognised by the Nobel Foundation, Sweden and he was invited to be a plenary speaker on 'Nonsteroidal antifertility agents' in the symposium on Fertility Control held in Stockholm in May, 1970, but he could not accept the invitation on account of other commitments.

In 1973, Dr Kar and his associates initiated work on the development of chemical tubal and vasal occluding agents as a non-surgical method for tubectomy and vasectomy. This has resulted in identification of a number of new active compounds in this area, two of which are now under preclinical evaluation.

Dr Kar made some very noteworthy contributions to basic research in the field of reproductive physiology. His studies on the role of peripheral extragonadal endocrine factors in reproduction and fertility, particularly the thyroid, led to the demonstration of a direct 'thyroprostatic axis', the thyroid hormones being responsible for keeping the prostatic sensitivity to androgen and estrogen within optimal physiological limits. This discovery has important implications on the enigmatic overgrowth and neoplasia of the prostate in old age. His studies on the cause and identification of incipient of the ovarian follicles showed that spontaneous atresia is an autolytic process caused by lysosomal enzymes such as acid phosphatase. The peak rate of follicular atresia is characterised by a sharp drop in acid phosphatase activity. His group could show that during ovum transport in the fallopian tube, lactic acid is involved in ova development and the acid phosphatase activity is probably concerned with post-denudation removal of cumulus and corona cell debris. However, no part of the tube was found to be preferentially sensitive to estrogen, progesterone or their combination.

Dr Kar and his associates also conducted extensive studies on the physiology and biochemistry of the male genital organs. Their studies on the effect of antispermatogenic agents on testicular fluid and isolated seminiferous



tubules established that these agents influence primarily energy producing system and the effect on protein synthesis and steroidogenesis was secondary to this. Their studies on zinc metabolism in the prostate demonstrated that its effect is modulated by sex hormones and this metal may be involved in the stimulation of sperm motility. He was made Chairman of the Session on 'Control of male fertility' at the Second International Congress of Endocrinology, London, 1969.

Dr Kar Published over 350 research papers and reviewed articles in about 60 national and international journals and was a co-author of three World Health Organization monographs. He was a member of the editorial board of (a) Steroids (b) Contraception (c) Indian Journal of Experimental Biology (d) Indian Journal of Pharmacology and (e) Proceedings of the Indian National Science Academy—Series B. He served as Chairman, Vice-Chairman, plenary speaker, discussion leader and discussion moderator of numerous national and international congresses, conferences, symposia and workshops on human reproduction and control of fertility for nearly two decades. He was a research guide and examiner for PhD, MD and MSc degree of about 10 Universities in the country.

MEMBERSHIP

Dr Kar served as Member, Advisory Group and Consultant, Human Reproduction, WHO, Geneva (1964-1974), Vice-Chairman of 3 HRP Scientific Group Meetings (1963-1967, 1968) at WHO, Geneva; Member, Advisory Group on Scientific Aspects of Family Flanning, ICMR, New Delhi (1966-1974); Member, Scientific Advisory Board, ICMR (1971-1974); Member of the Programme Evaluation and Planning Committee for Family Planning for drafting the 4th and 5th Five-Year Plans of the Ministry of Health and Family Planning, Government of India; Member, Sectional Committee on Zoology, Indian National Science Academy; Member, Family Planning Association of India and Pathfinder Fund, India (1969-1974), Member, Biological Research Panel, IPPF, London (1971-1973).

Honours And Awards

For his outstanding contributions to biomedical research and family planning, Dr Kar received many honours and awards, which included Dr P N Raju Award of the Indian Council of Medical Research in 1966; National Award of the Ministry of Health and Family Planning, Government of India in 1969; Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry Award in 1971; Inventions Promotion Board Award in 1972 and Asiatic Society Gold Medal in 1972. He was elected Fellow of the Indian National Science Academy in 1969. The President of India bestowed on him the Padma Shri in 1989.

Towards the end of 1972, Dr Kar had a paralytic stroke and was bedridden for nearly six months. But he recovered due to his strong will power and resumed his duties. Again in mid-1975, he had an attack of cerebral thrombosis from which he did not recover and breathed his last in Calcutta on January 6, 1976.

Dr Kar, though a hard task-master, was always kind and helpful. He never spared himself from hard work and demanded similar dedication from his students and colleagues. He was married on August 15, 1948 to Geeta Mitra, B A (now deceased) daughter of Shri Dwipendra Nath Mitra and Mrs Lilian Mitra. This biography would be incomplete without a reference to Mrs Geeta Kar, his wife. She was a source of inspiration to him in his academic pursuits and used to remark that Dr Kar was wedded more to his work rather than to her. She predeceased Dr Kar by a couple of months.

The author is grateful to Shri Hiten Mitra, brother-in-law of Dr Kar, for providing informations about his family and early education.

V P KAMBOJ

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