ARDHENDU SEKHAR MUKHERJEE

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ARDHENDU SEKHAR MUKHERJEE (1935-2004)

(Elected Fellow 1983)

FAMILY BACKGROUND AND EDUCATION

RDHENDU SEKHAR MUKHERJEE was born on October 1, 1935 in Patadanga, Ain Birbhum district, West Bengal. His father's name was Shiva Shanker Mukherjee and mother's name was Smt. Nirupama Mukherjee. His father was a Headmaster in a high school in Bihar. Ardhendu Sekhar Mukherjee was the third child of his parents. As his father was a Head master of a school in Bihar, he had his schooling in a village of Bihar. After his preparatory school, he went to Nabinagar High School in Bihar. He passed matriculation examination in 1951, from Patna University. Thereafter, he completed his intermediate studies in TNJ College, Bhagalpur, from Bihar University in 1953. He was then admitted to Presidency college Kolkata, for his graduation. Ardhendu Sekhar Mukherjee was fortunate to enroll himself in B.Sc. (Zoology Hons.) at the Presidency college and had the opportunity of being taught by Prof. Sivotosh Mookerjee, a great teacher with great personality. He was also fortunate in learning comparative anatomy of vertebrates from another great teacher of the time, Prof. Jitendra Nath Rudra, to whom Prof. Ardhendu Sekhar Mukherjee had deep regard. Both Professor Rudra and Professor Sivotosh Mookerjee was glamorous and romantic with clear conceptuality and comprehension on the subjects he taught, while Prof. Rudra was highly provocative to impermeate thought and imagination into students, was also comprehensive and had a great command on the subjects he taught. In fact, Ardhundu Sekhar Mukherjee was influenced by his teachers in Presidency Colleges at that time so much that his basic training in swimming through love for science vis-à-vis Zoology was completed in Presidency College and that was mainly due to Professor Sivotosh Mookerjee. In 1955, he graduated from University of Calcutta, securing first position in first class. He completed his M.Sc. degree in Zoology from the same University in 1957 and stood first class first. During the period, he had also the opportunity to come close to some very renowned scientist like Prof. JBS Haldane and Prof. SP Raychaudhuri. Dr. Mukherjee was thus under the influence of a great tradition and of teachers who were both intellectually and experimentally creative scholars.

In 1959, he got married to Sati who had been the virtuous and strong life companion of a scientist. Mukherjees had two sons. Elder one is Dibyendu who is a computer engineer in USA and the younger one Subhendu is also a computer engineer and settled in USA.

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PROFESSIONAL CAREER

After passing his M.Sc., Dr. Mukherjee spent two significant years as a research fellow under Prof. SP Raychaudhuri at the Department of Zoology, University of Calcutta, and became a practicing *Drosophila* geneticist. When he was selected for the 'State Fellowship' for his higher studies in abroad, he decided to go to USA. He selected Prof. Curt Stern's (renowned *Drosophila* geneticist) laboratory, for his predoctoral studies. Accordingly, he went to University of California, Berkley, USA, for his higher studies and completed his Ph.D. degree in Development Genetics. During the time he was also trained in human genetics. In 1964, he was also appointed as a course lecturer in human genetics, in the Department of Genetics University of California, Berkley, USA.

After receiving his doctoral degree from the University of California, Berkley, USA, he spent a year in Germany as a post-doctoral fellow in the laboratory of Wolfgang Beermann. During the time Beermann's laboratory was using what at the time was a state of the art molecular technique: transcription autoradiography. Using the technique, Mukherjee and Beermann first showed that the difference in morphology of the polytene X in the two sexes reflects a difference in level of activity. In 1965, he published his much acclaimed and popular theory of dosage compensation in *Drosophila* in Nature. His pioneering work on the hyperactive theory of dosage compensation in *Drosophila* induced other scientists to examine genetic control of all aspects of dosage compensation. This line of scientific investigation led Prof. Mukherjee to formulate a theoretical framework for the genetic regulation in higher eukaryotes.

On his return to India, in 1965, he joined as a Lecturer in the Department of Zoology, University of Calcutta, Kolkata. At the young age, he was very popular and friendly with all his colleagues, other teachers of Zoology and other faculties and officers including his subordinate staff. He was instrumental in creating a friendly atmosphere and a friendly relation among students and teachers. It was largely because of the initiatives and dedicated efforts of Prof. Mukherjee who established a strong school of Drosophila geneticist, the Department of Zoology, University of Calcutta, obtained the first UGC supported special assistance in 1976 in the area of genetics. He was also warded UNDP programme besides a large number of projects from other national bodies. He remained in the Department of Zoology, University of Calcutta until his retirement in 2000. He held appointments at the Zoology Department, University of Calcutta, as Lecturer (1965-1974), Reader (1974-1978), and ultimately as a Professor (1978-2000). He was also the Head of the Department during 1983-1984. His farsightedness and imperative attitude led him to create an atmosphere of excellence among his colleagues. He could foresee the development of science much ahead of time. He visited many times USA and Germany. For example, in 1971, Dr. Mukherjee, went to the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, USA

visiting scientist and worked on mammalian oncology. He also visited several times in Prof. Finendegen's laboratory as a visiting scientist and worked on exogenous DNA incorporation, phosphopeptide, protein function etc. in human cell culture. In addition he visited many places in Europe and USA to present his results at conferences and seminars as well as a visiting professor.

Prof. Mukherjee was an outstanding keen observer, a very thorough and skilful geneticist and cytologist, a man who investigated a probable to the last detail. At the same time, he was able to recognize the essence of a phenomenon and common principles among a wealth of details. His work on dosage compensation and control of DNA replication has placed Mukherjee's group on an international platform. All his works have gained repute and have been confirmed by scientists abroad and cited in nearly 100 reviews and at least half a dozen books (e.g. in the three text books by Herskowitz, King and Levine, in Genetic mosaic and other assays by C Stern, in Animal Cytology and evolution MJD White, Cell differentiation by W Beermann, in Biology of *Drosophila* by Ashburner and Novitski and in Biology of Drosophila, edited by Wright and Ashburner). His theory on the male X hyperactivity as the mechanism of dosage compensation has been accepted as Mukherjee's theory of dosage compensation. According to this theory, the single X chromosome of *Drosophila* male compensates the gene products of the diplo X female by hyperactive transcription and faster rate of DNA replication.

Mukherjee's studies on the role of repair system in the fixation of mutations and hormone and cancer research have opened up new vistas in molecular biology and genetics; the latter work has been cited by Dr. Robert Holley (Nobel Laureate). He was also a master of formal genetics, a competence not found too often among cytologists. He described his results convincingly and could get others to recognize their general importance. He did not hesitate to draw far reaching conclusions those could be experimentally tested and were later proven to be correct. For example, he realized that the dosage compensation in *Drosophila* offered a model for the gene regulation in eukaryotes. Although he came up with the right results at the right time, part of his early success in winning the attention of the scientific community was the result.

Here I would simply like to recollect some of the qualities of the remarkable man. My first impression was of his brilliance. He was quick in his thought process and his eyes seemed to light up as the solution to a problem sprang into his mind. Most of his life time was spent for working mostly in genetics of *Drosophila*. In this context, it may be noted here that the first *Drosophila* laboratory in India was started by Prof. SP Raychaudhuri, a student of Prof. HJ Muller, Nobel Lauriate, with the help of Prof. JBS Haldane. Prof. AS Mukherjee, played a very important role in spreading *Drosophila* research in India. He always kept his vision on new area of research where transformation of the common fruit fly *Drosophila* to 'queen of

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genetics' took place in the last few decades in the earlier century. He had rightly chosen his research material *Drosophila* which is now one of the most studied organisms in genetics and development biology. Prof. Mukherjee always tried to teach us that a researcher can derive satisfaction from the daily performance of his task, that the most important attributes of a scientific career are curiosity that lead to the planning of experiments and ability to perform these experiments. He was worried about two serious threats to the fundamental nature of scientific research and the role that it played and would continue to play in our culture and civilization: a goal-oriented approach coupled with the pressure for immediate relevance. He believed that research, like other serious human endeavors, should be approached thoughtfully and conducted ethically.

IMPORTANT RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

Here, I would highlights of a brilliantly successful scientific career of Prof. Mukherjee. He published about 200 research papers including four chapters in books on developmental biology and genetics. He supervised forty one Ph.D. and four M. Phil students. Towards his students, Mukherjee showed much tolerance and understanding. He wanted them to work and think independently, and some time he would reluctant to put his name on a publication to which he had not contributed with personal work. He thus continued a tradition from which he had himself benefited as a student. Out of his associated, I mention two scholars whose research grew directly out of his own. In 1969, Subhas Chandra Lakhotia had shown cellular autonomy of dosage compensation in Drosophila. He also showed that faster rate of replication of the male X chromosome might be sufficient to sustain a hyperactivation of the male X chromosome. At the same time, RK Dutta had studied the pattern formation in Drosophila comb gap region. He had also pioneered on the prepattern concept of Drosophila development. In brief, he was a recognized authority in his field of sex determination and dosage compensation research. In addition, some contributions have been made by Mukherjee in the fields are: (a) recombination in male, (b) fractional mutations and repair, (c) developmental genetics and biological patterns, (d) hormones role in replication and maintenance, (e) exogenous DNA incorporation etc.

Mukherjee's laboratory was unique in the field in India as evidenced by the incredible number of visitors from the United States and other countries including numerous eminent scholars, who stayed for days, weeks and months and who were instrumental in bringing about the singular atmosphere that lived forever in the memory of Mukherjee's Ph.D. and post doctoral fellows. One such visitor was Prof. JC Lucchesi, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill USA, who transferred to the young generation the spirit of a scientific tradition of the department.

In this context, it may be noted here that recently, Prof. JC Lucchesi, William G Kelly and Barbara Panning of the Department of Biology, Enory University Atlanta, Georgia 30222, USA have dedicated *Drosophila* portion of their review entitled *"Chromatin Remodelling in Dosage Compensation"* that appeared in *Annu Rev Genet* 2005 615-651 in the name of Prof. AS Mukherjee.

Prof. Mukherjee was also fortunate that he could perceive his position in the history of our science through the many honours and awards which were bestowed upon him during his career. Amongst the many awards and honours which were bestowed on Professor Mukherjee as recognition of his academic works, the following may be mentioned:

- Gold Medalist from Calcutta University for being 1st class First in M.Sc., 1957.
- Oversea State Scholar, Govt. of West Bengal, 1959.
- Platinum Jublee distinguished Service Award of Indian Science Congress Association.
- Dr. Har Swarup Memorial Lecture Award of INSA.
- Jaykrishna Chakravorty Oration Lecture Award, in 1999 of N.R.S. Medical College.

National Recognition

- UNDP grants to selected laboratories: Endocrinology and Genetics, in 1980.
- He was honoured by UGC by awarding him Sir JC Bose National Award for research in Life Science in the year 1986.
- Indo-Royal Society Exchange Fellowship program by INSA in 1986.
- He was elected as the Sectional President (Zoology, Entomology and Fisheries) of Indian Science Congress Association for the year, 1985-1986.
- 1986-1987 Prof. Mukherjee was invited by the UGC to deliver lectures at a number of Universities under the national lecture programme.
- 1990-91 Prof. Mukherjee was nominated as a member of the Zoology review committee of the UGC.
- He served as the President, Zoological Society, Kolkata for 1998-2000.
- He was General Secretary (Hqrs) of the Indian Science Congress Association for the year, 1998-2000.
- He was a member of Scientific Panel of University Grants Commission, Indian National Science Academy and panel Referee for Research Projects submitted to Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Department of Science and Technology (DST), and Ph.D. examiner of several Universities. He was also member of several scientific societies/academies.
- Prof. Mukherjee was a Fellow of two Academies of Science in the country. In 1983, he was elected a Fellow of the Indian National Science Academy and 1985, he was offered the Fellowship of the Academy of Science, Bangalore.

International Recognition

- Membership of National Sigma Xi Society, 1962.
- Abraham Rosenberg Merit Scholar, USA, 1963.
- Post doctoral Fellow, Max-Planck Institute, Germany from 1964-1965.
- In 1971, he spent three months as a visiting scientist in the Nuclear Research Center, Julich, Germany and conducted research on exogenous DNA incorporation.
- In 1972-1973, he had worked as a post doctoral fellow in the University of Nebruska, Lincon, USA and worked on mouse mammary gland and hormonal action and gene expression.
- In 1978, he worked as a Visiting Scientist in the Nuclear Research Centre, Julich, Germany and worked on role of phosphopeptides in gene regulation. In this year he was also invited to the 13th International Congress of Genetics held at Moscow to present his results.
- In 1980, he spent three months in the University of Texas, Huston USA and worked on cell fusion studies.
- In 1982, he spent two months in the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, USA and worked on DNA fibre autoradiography and gene expression.

He was also invited to present an account of his researches at cell biology genetic conference at various centres in USA, UK and Germany in 1986, 1990, 1995, 1996, 1998.

POPULARIZATION OF SCIENCE AND EDITORIAL ACTIVITIES

He along with his collaborator published a book "Biswabhara Pran" (The Universe full of life) in Bengali. He also delivered several public lectures in All India Radio, and Doordarshan, Calcutta on Genetic diseases. He also published a "Bengali" book "Aki Paraga a thui ful" (Human cloning).

He has been the Honorary Editor of the Journal Proceedings of the *Zoological Society, Calcutta* for 1988-1997. He was served as a member of Editorial Board of the *Science and Culture, Indian Journal of Experimental Biology* and others for several years.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Professor Ardhendu Sekhar Mukherjee, died on November 15, 2004 at his home, Kolkata. He was 69 years old. In his passing away, the community of Zoologists, Geneticists in particular, from both India and abroad have lost a brilliant academician, an outstanding scientist and an excellent teacher.

He is survived by his wife Mrs. Sati Mukherjee, his two sons, Dibyendu and shubbondu, daughters-in-law, Anindita and Sumana and his grand children

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Nishant, Maya, Rianna and Ryone. Those of us who knew him personally were fortunate enough to be directly influenced by him and will continue to honour him for years to come. He lives in the memory of his numerous colleagues friends and former students. The best tribute we could offer to Prof. Mukherjee is by adhering to his principles: continue basic research in genetics using *Drosophila* as a model system. Thus, when every time we push a fly, use a balancer stock or deficiency line, or studying *Drosophila* polytene chromosomes, we remember our teacher, Prof. AS Mukherjee.

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