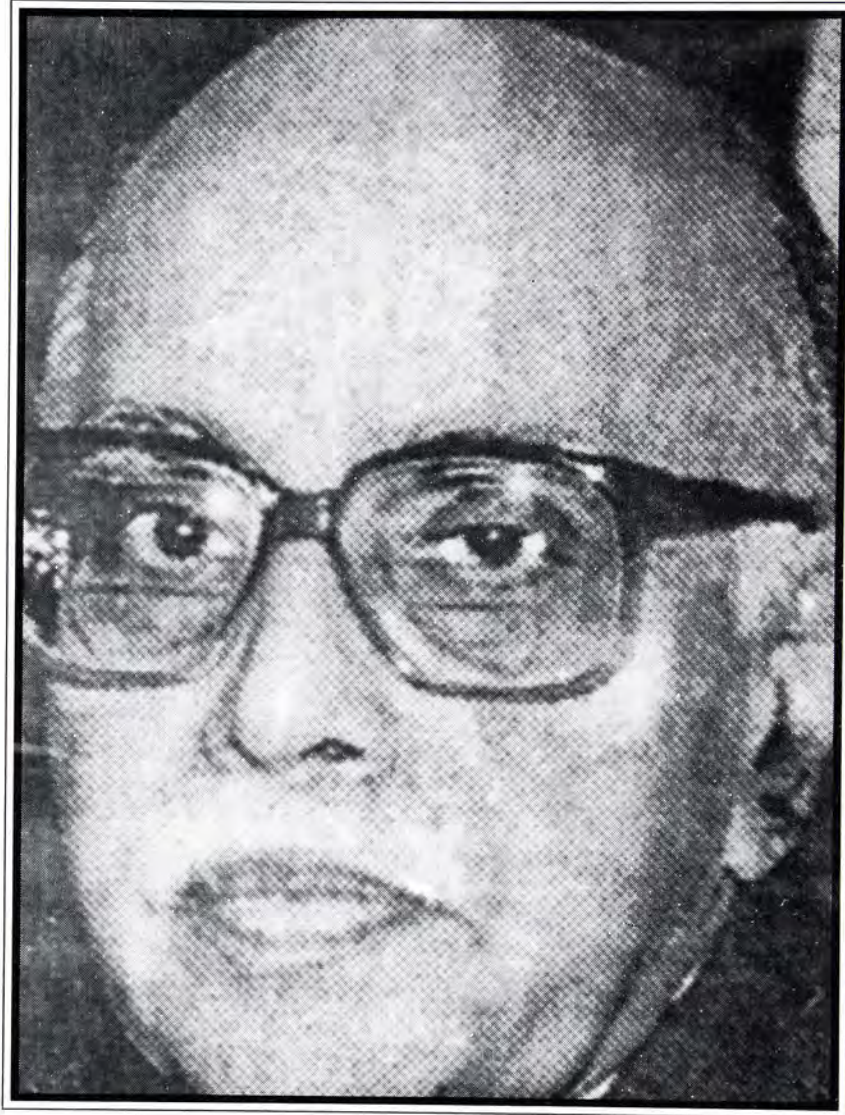


ANTAPUR VENKOBA RAO

(28 August 1927 – 25 September 2005)

Biog. Mem. Fell. INSA, N. Delhi **29** 233-242 (2006)





Aben K. Saha



ANTAPUR VENKOBA RAO

(1927 - 2005)

Elected 1989

EARLY EDUCATION

ANTAPUR VENKOBA RAO was born on the 20th of August 1927 in the village Kavuttalam which is presently in Andhra Pradesh to Mr A Raghavendra Rao and Srimati Lakshmi Devi. He was the eldest of eight children (six brothers and two sisters). He grew up mostly in his grand father's house and naturally was influenced by him. His grandfather was a disciplinarian. He attached lot of importance to honesty and religious faith. He had his early schooling in Municipal High School, Bellary. His school days were pleasant with a good degree of appreciation from his teachers. His general interest was towards botany, zoology and agriculture, this being the main occupation of his parents and grandparents.

Professor Rao studied Intermediate in Ceded District college, Anantapur, securing first prize in Natural Sciences. He got first class with distinction (Physics, Chemistry and Natural Sciences). He did his MBBS at Madras Medical College and secured prizes in Medicine, Obstetrics and Gynaecology. He had special training by Dr ST Achar in Paediatrics. He was greatly influenced by Dr RV Rajam, Dr JAS Masilamani, Dr KS Sanjivi, Dr Mohan Rao and Dr Ratnavel Subramanian. He got his MD in general medicine and DPM in from NIMHANS, Bangalore. He was awarded PhD and DSc by Madras University.

HIS FAMILY

Professor Rao married Parvathi Devi on the 26th of February 1950. Dr Parvathi had a distinguished college career won the blue ribbon as the best outgoing student of Madras Medical College. She held the posts of Director, Institute of Physiology, Madras Medical College and the Institute of Physiology, Madurai Medical College and Government Rajaji Hospital, Madurai. Her areas of interest are Neurophysiology, Reproductive physiology and Neuroendocrinology. She has several publications in National and International Journals.

Raos have two children, a daughter and a son. Their daughter Dr AV Santhi is an MD (pathology). She has worked with the Institute of Pathology, Institute of Child Health, Egmore. She is married to Dr S Ramanathan, Professor of Paediatric Surgery. They have a son. Dr Rao's son Dr AV Ashok is a Professor of English in the



Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages. His wife Mrs Savitri is an M.A. in English Literature. They have a daughter.

HIS CAREER

Professor Rao was an Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at the Stanley Medical College and Madras Medical College, Chennai. Subsequently he served as a Professor and Head of the Department of Psychiatry in Madurai Medical College from 1962 to 1985.

After retirement he continued to be associated with Madurai Medical College as an Emeritus Professor. Besides he was officer-in-charge, ICMR Centre for Advanced Research in Health and Behaviour, Madurai Medical College and Rajaji Government Hospital, Madurai. He was a Visiting Scientist at the National Institute of Mental Health, Bethesda, USA.

Professor Rao served as the Editor-in-Chief of Indian Journal of Psychiatry from 1970 to 1978. He has been in the Editorial Board of Indian Journal of Psychiatry, Social Psychiatry, NIMHANS Journal, Transcultural Psychiatric Review and Crisis. He was associated with ICMR, NAMS, DST and Medical Council of India in various capacities. He has contributed to the area of teaching in psychiatry, has more than 300 National and International publications including a dozen books.

FOREIGN VISITS

Professor Rao had visited several Universities and Centres of Psychiatric Research in the United Kingdom, Europe, USA, Canada, Australia, South America, Malaysia, Japan and the Far East. He attended the World Congress of Psychiatry in Madrid (1966), Mexico city (1971) and Vienna (1983). He attended the Congress of the International Association for Suicide Prevention and Crisis Intervention in Mexico city (1971) and in Helsinki (1977). He has been the Vice Chairman of this organization for 12 years. He attended and presented papers at the first British Lithium Congress at Lancaster (1977) and on invitation at the Mc Gill University in Montreal in 1976. He presented papers at the African Psychriatric Congress at London in 1983, WHO meeting on classification of Psychiatric disorders of the elderly at Louvain, Belgium in 1980. On special invitation, he attended the Eighth Medical Conference at Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in 1983. and presented papers.

RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

Professor Rao has made original contribution to the clinical profile of depressive illness in the Indian setting, in epidemiology, genetic aspects, long-term course and outcome and interpreted the phenomenology of illness with reference to the Indian cultural and philosophical context . He was a pioneer in this research.



On suicidal behaviour in India, Professor Rao has made significant contributions regarding etiological factors and most importantly on prophylaxis and the relationship between pineal hormones, depressive illness and suicidal behaviour. He was the first to start a lithium clinic which had on its rolls two hundred patients with affective disorders, one of the largest in the world and has investigated its clinical effects, safety and mode of action in depth. In Geriatric psychiatry his original observations have provided the basis for organization of integrated primary health care at the PHC level and should serve as a model for the care of elderly in India. His deep study of Indian philosophies and, especially Bhagawat Gita has added a new dimension to psychotherapy in India. According to Dr Rao, Gita is the masterpiece of psychotherapy.

Professor Rao's major achievements have been on "depressive diseases". For over three decades he has focused on its neurobiological psychopharmacological, experimental, neuropsychiatric and transcultural aspects.

(a) Neurobiological Aspect:

Prof. Rao reported significantly low levels of melatonin (pineal gland hormone) in acute phase of depression with reversal to normal on remission. His observations concluded that the failure of melatonin to return to normal on remission was indicative of early relapses. Decreased melatonin during remission also correlated with the symptom of hopelessness and high suicide risk. He described "low melatonin syndrome", a sub type of depression.

(b) Psychopharmacological Aspects:

Prof. Rao pioneered India's lithium clinic and reported on correlation between dosage and serum levels, change in electrolytes, thyroid, ECG, renal structure and functions and memory. Efficacy of long-term lithium-prophylaxis was documented.

(c) Experimental Aspect:

Studies included effects of psychotropics, tricyclic anti-depressants and lithium on pineal histology and melatonin secretion. These pointed to some of their actions being 'pineal mediated'.

(d) Neuropsychiatric Aspects:

His publication on GPI highlighted incidence, serology, clinical types and the outcome of the illness following therapy. He achieved the distinction of demonstrating 'treponema pallida' in frontal lobes of these patients and their disappearance on treatment. Important among the observations was the absence of 'depressive type' of clinical presentation contradicting Western data.



(e) Transcultural Aspect:

Prof. Rao observed that depression in India is no less frequent than in the West thereby dispelling the notion of its rarity. The clinical picture of Indian depression differed very little from Western depression except in diminished guilt and higher frequency of somatic than psychological symptoms. Suicide propensity too was less. The lower suicide potential can be attributed to the built in suicide counters of economic, familial, religious, social and ethical nature.

Professor Rao's follow up study (3-13 years) of 109 out of 122 depressives pertained recurrences, switch over from depression to mania, chronicity, social invalidism, intellectual deterioration and mortality (contributing to 72%). The disorder did not carry a favourable outcome as was believed earlier, with 28% alone enjoying lasting remission. Its non-benign nature is currently accepted.

While cognitive theory of depression holds that negative cognitions of individual predispose to future depression, Prof. Rao finds no support for this. He observes that they are 'state dependant' rather than 'trait feature.'

Professor Rao is one of the few who have constantly applied themselves to research on diverse aspects of depression as evidenced by publications on the subject spanning several years.

AWARDS AND HONOURS

The following are the awards received by Prof. Rao:

1. Dr BC Roy National Award from the Medical Council of India for the development of specialities in 1981
2. Dr PN Raju Oration Award from the Indian Council of Medical Research for his research on 'Suicidal behaviour and depression' in 1975
3. Dr MN Sen Oration Award from the Indian Council of Medical Research for his research on 'Depressive Illness' in 1975
4. Sir Shri Ram Oration Award from the National Academy of Medical Sciences for his Contribution to Psychiatry in India in the year 1983
5. Sandoz Oration Award of the University of Edinburgh 1984
6. Sandoz Award from the Indian Psychiatric Society for the best paper published in the year 1972
7. Dr DNL Murti Rao Award from the Indian Psychiatric Society in 1980
8. JC Marfatia Award in 1972, 1973 and 1979 from the Indian Psychiatric Society for the best paper presented in Annual Conferences
9. Poona Psychiatric Association Award from the Indian Psychiatric Society 1982



10. Manasa Hospital Oration Award from Andhra Pradesh Chapter, Indian Psychiatric Society 1985
11. Dr B Ramamurthi Gold Medal and Oration Award from the Indian Medical Association, Trichy 1984
12. MK Seshadri Prize and Gold Medal 1987
13. May and Baker Oration Award, Geriatric Society of India 1990
14. NN De Oration Award 1991
15. Academy of Medical Practitioners' Award 1989-90
16. International Research Award from the American Psychiatric Association (RIM Pacific)

FELLOWSHIP OF ACADEMIES

1. Fellow, Royal College of Psychiatrists, England 1972
2. Fellow, National Academy of Medical Sciences, India 1975
3. Corresponding Fellow, American Psychiatric Association 1975
4. Fellow, Association of Psychiatrists, Africa 1972
5. Corresponding member, Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists 1975
6. Fellow, Indian Academy of Sciences 1983
7. Fellow, American Psychiatrists Association
8. Fellow, Canadian Association of Psychiatrists
9. Fellow, Indian Academy of Neurology
10. President, Association of Gerontology (1990-92)
11. Founder President, Indian Association of Social Psychiatrists

OTHER RECOGNITIONS

1. WHO Consultant 1980
2. Member, National Committee to study addiction in India

HIS LAST DAYS

Professor Rao was active till his last days. The author had seen him listening to the lectures in Physics, Metallurgy and Chemistry from the Fellows of the Indian National Science Academy during the AGM in Chennai on 28th of December 2004 with rapt attention. It is unusual for medical practitioners to listen to lectures in



fields other than their own and especially at the age of 77. Prof. Rao breathed his last on 25th September 2005 creating a niche for himself in the field of Psychiatry.

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Errata (Vol. 28)

We regret to inform our valuable readers this errata and request them to read the corrected Bibliography as under. We deeply regret for the inconvenience caused.

Page 120, Vol. 28	printed	to read as
5 th Line above	'early morning of 5 th January 2001'	'early morning of 5 th January 2002'
A universal mind		

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