



K. V. Krishnan

KUMARAPURAM VYTHILINGA KRISHNAN

(1896–1978)

Foundation Fellow 1935

KUMARAPURAM VYTHILINGA KRISHNAN was born on July 4, 1896, in a Brahmin family of Thali, a suburb of Calicut in Kerala. He was the seventh child of his parents and that is the reason for his bearing the name Krishnan according to the local tradition associated with the birth of Lord Krishna. He had four brothers and two sisters elder to him besides a younger brother and a sister. Only the younger brother and one of the elder sisters survived him. One of his forbears, Vythilinga Sastry, was a noted Sanskrit scholar and served as priest in the Hindu temple, 'Vaitheeswaran Koil' in Thanjavur District. He left this temple with his rather large family to settle in Chithur in the Kerala State where he received support from the Rajah of 'Palghat'. Dr Krishnan's father, Vythilinga Venkateswaran, was supposed to have inherited some lands but promptly lost them while trying to do business. This jeopardised Krishnan's education to some extent, but with the help of his mother Shrimati Subholakshmi and that of a philanthropic relative he was able to complete his graduation in Medicine from the Madras Medical College.

MARRIAGE, WIFE, CHILDREN AND REMINISCENCES OF PRIVATE LIFE

Krishnan was married to Shrimati Visalakshmi Ammal, grand daughter of Rao Sahib K. D. Subrahmanya Iyer as well as of Justice Ranga Iyer, Chief Judge of Travancore High Court. They had four children—a son and three daughters. The son, Chama Krishnan, is a pharmaceutical chemist. The eldest daughter *Rance* is married to Dr R. Subrahmaniam, now retired as Director of Health Services of Madhya Pradesh. The second daughter, Sorojini, was married to Shri P. S. Narayan who died prematurely leaving two sons and a daughter. The third daughter of Dr Krishnan, Lalitha, is an M. A. in Philosophy and is now in the U.S.A. with her husband.

After the death of his first wife in 1941, Krishnan married Ivy Massih, a talented doctor in the Women's Medical Service. She was Professor of Pharmacology in the Lady Hardinge Medical College, New Delhi, and subsequently in the Cuttack Medical College. She also died almost simultaneously with Dr Krishnan. Dr Krishnan died of sudden heart attack on his telephone desk while trying to contact the hospital where his wife had been admitted earlier. Neither knew the death of the other.



To them a daughter was born. She was named Indira alias Dodo. She turned out to be a brilliant scholar, did her Ph.D. in Sociology in U.S.A., where she is currently practising as Consultant Sociologist. She is married to Devaji Subramaniam, a lawyer working as legal consultant in U.S.A.

EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

Dr Krishnan's early education started in 1902 in S. P. G. High School in Vepery, Madras, and successively in four other schools between 1903 and 1906 namely, City High School, Broadway, Madras (1903-05), Christian Collegiate School (1905-06) and in the Hindu High School, Triplicane. He studied for 2 years (1912-14) in Pachaiyappa's College in Royapettah. He was a very good student in school and won many prizes. The Headmaster of the Hindu High School where he matriculated was Srinivasa Sastry who later became the Rt. Hon'ble Sir Srinivasa Sastry. As a young boy Krishnan was fond of South Indian music and it is known that his first wife was proficient in it. He actively participated in the Swadeshi Movement and is reported to have burnt his most favourite coat made from foreign cloth.

KRISHNAN AS A PERSON

Dr Krishnan was a true nationalist. He did not like the idea of appointing foreign experts to advise us here, though, he felt that if necessary, Indians could learn advanced techniques in foreign countries and apply them for improving ours. He was also a social reformer and was indignant at the way scheduled castes were treated in South India. His best friend was Dr Raghavan who belonged to the Thiya scheduled caste.

Dr Krishnan was well versed in Tamil as well as in Sanskrit. He used to recite the *Vishnu Sahasranama stotra* which he had learnt from his grandfather early in life. He was an ardent admirer of *Ādi Sankaracharya* and his *Advaita* philosophy. He was a versatile person interested in subjects like religion (both Hindu and Christian theology), astrology, sociology, Indian and western music and dance, besides his own professional interests, microbiology and public health. He respected Christianity as much as Hinduism and used to attend church service on Sundays.

He wanted his children to develop a high sense of duty and often quoted Nelson, "England expects every man to do his duty." His family talk with children was interesting as he loved to sit with them and keep them spell-bound with his narrations. In his professional career, he was an excellent speaker and could give new ideas in his speeches on important matters.

He lived in Calcutta for 45 years since he joined the All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health as Professor of Malariology and Rural Hygiene in 1934. He had a wide circle of friends amongst the intelligensia in Calcutta, including Dr B. C. Roy, Sir Nilratan Sircar, Sir Hassan Suhra-scardy, Sri K. C. Mahinder, Sir U. N. Brahmachari, Dr A. C. Ukil and many others. He was an admirer of Dr B. C. Roy and Jawaharlal Nehru. He was a close friend



of the Late President of India, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, and his family. He became acquainted with him during their study in England.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL CAREER

After two years of intermediate Science course in Pachaiyappa's College he joined the Madras Medical College in 1914 and graduated from the college in 1919. He then joined the King Institute, Guindy, and worked there till 1925 as Assistant Surgeon in the employment of the Government of Madras. That year, he was awarded the Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship and spent four years in U. K. and U.S.A. for obtaining postgraduate training. In U. K., he first obtained D. B. from the London School of Tropical Medicine and M.R.C.P. from Edinburgh. He then moved to U.S.A. and worked in Johns Hopkins University and obtained his D.Sc. in 1931. He was appointed as a member of the *Kala-azar* Commission of Assam and was also attached to the School of Tropical Medicine, Calcutta. He was appointed Professor of Malariology and Rural Hygiene at the All India Institute of Hygiene & Public Health, Calcutta in 1934. This post was redesignated as Professor of Microbiology in 1940 at the suggestion of Dr J. B. Grant, the then Director of the Institute. He became the Director of the Institute in 1952 and retired from this post in 1956 to assume the post of WHO Consultant for Preventive and Social Medicine of the Kabul University, Afghanistan, and served in that capacity till 1964.

SCIENTIFIC ACHIEVEMENTS

Dr Krishnan devoted himself to medical research and teaching throughout his life. He achieved considerable success, and became a renowned and top-ranking medical scientist in contemporary India. He had at least 65 scientific publications to his credit, out of which the following five, published in collaboration with his colleagues, were outstanding : (i) Sandfly as a vector for transmission of *Kala-azar* (1931), (ii) Immunity in malaria (1934), (iii) Standardisation of antigens for flocculation test in syphilis (1936), (iv) Protein hydrolysate for intravenous administration in advanced cases of inanition involved in the Bengal famine during World War II (1945), (v) Scrub typhus infection.

HONOURS

In recognition of his scientific work, Dr Krishnan was made the Foundation Fellow of the National Institute of Sciences of India (F.N.I.) in 1935. While in U.S.A., he was elected a Fellow of the Alfa-Omega Society, Baltimore in 1927. In 1947, he was elected Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians (F.R.C.P.E.) and of the Royal Society of Edinburgh (F.R.S.E.). He was also awarded the Alpha-Omega Gold key by the Johns Hopkins University and the Minto Medal of the School of Tropical Medicine and Barclay Medal of the Asiatic Society of Calcutta. He was the recipient of Sir U. N. Brahmachari and Dutta Memorial Prizes of the Calcutta University. He was offered "*The King of Afghanistan*



Medal" in appreciation of his meritorious work in the teaching of Preventive Medicine and Public Health in that country, but WHO regulations prevented his receiving it.

SPECIAL LECTURESHIPS

He was selected to deliver the following special lectures : (i) Maharaja of Burdwan Lecture on *Malaria Problem in India*, (ii) Brahmachari Lecture on *Immunity in Tropical Diseases*, (iii) Dutta Memorial Lectures on *Recent Advances in Allergy*, (iv) Dr Lakshmanaswamy Mudalier Lecture on *Typhus Fevers in India*, (v) Andhra University Extension Lectures on *Transmission of Kala-azar and Typhus infection and Allergy in Medicine*. He also delivered lectures on protein hydrolysate in several institutions on invitation.

MEMBERSHIP OF SCIENTIFIC SOCIETIES AND ADVISORY COMMITTEES

Besides Fellowships of high ranking scientific societies mentioned earlier, Dr Krishnan was a member of the Public Health Society of India (now defunct), Indian Association of History of Medicine, Madras, Advisory Committees of the Indian Council of Medical Research. He also visited U.S.S.R. and China as member of medical delegations.

Dr Krishnan was not only an eminent medical scientist but also a good teacher and an eloquent speaker. He had a very successful career both as a researcher and as a teacher and served the country with devotion. He also endeared himself to all students, colleagues and others with whom he came in contact. He passed away on March 30, 1978, almost simultaneously with his second wife, at the age of 82.

S. C. SEAL

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