



Dr Kochukunju Prabhakaran, PhD
(1927–2010)

Dr Kochukunju Prabhakaran PhD, former Senior Scientist and Chief, Biochemistry Research Branch of Laboratory Research Branch, Gillis W Long Hansen's Disease Centre at the Louisiana State University breathed his last on 11th April, 2010 at Baton Rouge, LA, USA. His sudden demise is a great loss to leprosy community as a whole and biochemical researchers in leprosy in particular.

Dr K Prabhakaran was born on May 26, 1927 at Anchal, Kerala, India and completed school education at Anchal High School. He received Government scholarship from Devaswam Board, Kerala for pursuing higher studies. He was awarded BS (first rank), MS from the University College, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala and PhD from the University of Bombay, Mumbai (Indian Cancer Research Centre) in 1964.

In the year 1965, he had pointed out that *Mycobacterium leprae* is positive to DOPA (dihydroxy phenyl alanine) which was considered to be a break through in leprosy research. This was perhaps a first attempt to dissect out one of the hidden biochemical pathways of leprosy germ

which kept the drug discovery process of leprosy in research shelf. Several experimental results that came a decade later were in absolute agreement with the findings of Dr K Prabhakaran. He published his findings pertaining to enzymes of *M.leprae*, the cell wall component of *M.leprae*, and the intracellular survival pattern of *M.leprae* outside the human body, in peer reviewed journals, including Nature and Journal of Bacteriology. He had to his credit more than 100 research publications.

Dr Prabhakaran had gone to Carville, USA in the year 1966 and served, till his superannuation, as Chief Biochemist at GWL Hansen's Disease Centre at Carville campus. His research contributions to leprosy, especially biochemistry of *M.leprae* were significant. Dr K Prabhakaran's research in the field of leprosy briefly spanned the following areas - experimental leprosy, biochemistry of *M.leprae* including studies on structure and permeability of cell envelope and metabolism of the germ, intracellular survival of *M.leprae* both *in vitro* and in leprosy patients. When the

laboratory research branch moved to Louisiana State University (LSU) Veterinary School campus his research contributions included *M. tuberculosis* and other mycobacteria. He was a member of the Indian Association of Leprologists. He participated in several IAL conferences and published several papers in the Indian Journal of Leprosy.

Dr K Prabhakaran is survived by his wife, Mrs Lilly Prabhakaran and his two sons - Mr Arun Prabhakaran and Mr Ajit Prabhakaran. The memory of Dr Prabhakaran will be cherished for a long time by the leprologists. May the Lord

Almighty bless the departed soul with eternal peace.

I sincerely thank Mr Eugene Harris of GWL Hansens's Disease Centre, presently National Hansen's Disease Programme and Dr Vijayaraghavan, CLT&RI, Chengalpattu, Tamilnadu, for providing valuable information for incorporation into this obituary note.

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