

Dear Dr Murthy,

I have received your letter of 22nd Feb and am a bit non-plussed by its contents.

By your earlier letter, I understood that Dr Underk was to write the article on my Suku uncle. ^{this was confirmed when} Dr Underk ~~had also~~ telephoned me about this article and I had accordingly sent him ^{Suku Underk} the photo. ~~This also confirmed my~~

I sent you the xerox copies of ~~an~~ an ~~mag~~ insertion in the Times of India as a remembrance and a brief curriculum vitae submitted to the British Council, ~~which~~ this was only to give ^{you} a brief glimpse of Suku uncle's persona.

Your letter just received has put me in a quandary, ^{who is finally going to write it} have Dr Underk, ^{who was originally to write or Dr Nank who is now going to write it, resigned from} ~~then~~ this responsibility, and that I am expected to do it ~~on my own~~.

I have now enclosed for you

protection a ^{3/4} photograph of my
wreck. This is the only thing I could
obtain and hope this could be used.

Thanking you and hoping to ~~see~~
hear from you

Yours truly
but I would appreciate who
ever ^{ICAP} writes it would bring
out some of the more features
of his personality.

I was thirty by now you
must have returned from the
the milk stand. I hope
you are aware he had reached
this point of view

B-8, vindhya
Anushakti Nagar
Bombay-400074

3rd Feb. 1991.

Dear Dr. Murthy

I have received your letter of 22nd Feb. and am a bit non-plussed by its contents.

By your earlier letter I understood that either Dr. Naik or Dr. Undevia was to write the article on Suku uncle. This was confirmed when Dr. Undevia talked to me on phone about this obituary and I had accordingly sent him Suku uncle's photograph.

I sent you the xerox copy of the insertion in the Times of India, Bombay (20-12-90) as a remembrance and the brief curriculum vitae submitted to the British Council (during his last trip). This was only to give you a brief glimpse of Suku uncle's persona.

Your letter just received has put me in a quandary; who is finally going to write the obituary, Dr. Naik or Dr. Undevia myself or some body else. Perhaps you are aware that Mr. Sukanumaran reached this position of eminence, armed with a Matriculation certificate; this is the only

academic qualification he had. I am
unaware of any scientist from India or
abroad who in similar circumstances
achieved so much in our times. He had
carved a niche for himself in the field
of haemoglobinopathies both on the
national and international scene.

I would appreciate who ever writes the
obituary would bring out some of the
unique facets of his career and personality.
He was a wonderful human being, a
warm kind and caring human who
brought sunshine into those lives he
touched.

I have now enclosed for your publication
a B/w photograph of him. This is the only
copy I could obtain and hope this could
be used.

Thanking you and hoping to hear
from you.

With kind regards,
Yours sincerely,
Krishna

P.S. I am now recuperating
at home after an operation
on 16.2.91 for wire removal
of a Potts # fracture I suffered
three years back. ie why I was
unable to contact Dr. Malhotra or
Dr. Naik. I have not yet resumed
duty. May be after a week I will
resume.

(Krishna, A.P.)

HEMOGLOBIN, 15(5), v-vii (1991)

Krishna
2-12-91

IN MEMORIAM

P.K. SUKUMARAN



1920 - 1990

From a Tiny Acorn a Mighty Oak Does Grow. P.K. Sukumaran, known as "Suku" to his friends and colleagues the world over, passed away on December 10, 1990 in Bombay, India, at the age of 70. He had had a remarkable career. He started work at the Pasteur Institute in Coonoor at the age of 19. In 1952 he joined the Epidemiology and Genetics Division of the Tata Memorial Centre in Bombay as Technician, and he retired 30 years later as Head of the Division. Certainly a turning point in his scientific life was when, in the early 1950s, he became associated with the work of Hermann Lehmann, which led to their joint discovery of Hb S in the Indian subcontinent (1). From then on, Suku became one of Lehmann's faithful collaborators. "Lehmann was my guru", he used to say. A landmark of this collaboration was the report in

1972 of Hb Q-India, $\alpha_2\beta_2$ (E13)Asp \rightarrow His β_2 (2), one of the few polymorphic α chain mutants known.

At the same time, P.K. Sukumaran was developing his own research in his own country, and eventually published more than 80 papers in national and international journals, mostly on the population genetics and on the clinical implications of abnormal hemoglobins and thalassemia in India. In the fourth De Sa-Sanzgiri oration, which Suku delivered in 1984 at Margao-Goa, one can read a spirited autobiographic story of his own work: With characteristic modesty he lays emphasis, rather than on his own contribution, on his interactions with authoritative colleagues, including the Editor-in-Chief of HEMOGLOBIN. In the same oration there is a touching account of how in 1953, having investigated an Indian family in which a Hb F level greater than 20% was inherited through three generations, and having characterized the interaction of this condition with β -thalassemia as a thalassemia intermedia, he was persuaded by two eminent authorities in world hematology (MMW and WD) that this was nothing new! Hereditary persistence of fetal hemoglobin (HPFH) as we now know it, was reported a year later by Edington and Lehmann (3) from Ghana. Suku deeply regretted having lost the priority, and his advice to younger people was to "have the courage of your convictions that you are right and do not be led astray by others' opinions". At any rate, this did not stop Suku from eventually landing, with the Augusta group, the definitive hematological and molecular characterization of the Indian type of HPFH (4,5).

In addition to always remaining active in the laboratory, Suku was also active in scientific societies, as a journal editor, as a member of several academic committees, and on many occasions he served as Scientific Adviser to the World Health Organization; he was also a thesis examiner for higher degrees at three universities. It must have come as a surprise to many, as it did to me, when they learnt by chance that Suku had reached this position of eminence without having had the opportunity ever to obtain a university degree himself! Such a feat would perhaps be impossible

today, but let it be an encouragement for everybody pursuing scientific research for its own sake.

After his retirement Suku could not stop working. At the time of his death, he was engaged in a program aiming at the control of thalassemia in the Bombay area through heterozygote detection, genetic counseling, and the setting up of prenatal diagnosis: A proof that he was no less concerned about the public health implications of hemoglobinopathies than he was about understanding their biological basis. More than anything else, he will be remembered as a most compassionate, delightful, and wise human being. The 10-year-old daughter of his devoted niece Dr. A.P. Krishnaja, has written in a touching memorial, how he taught her to respect people and flowers, and has remembered his words: "Time and tide wait for no man".

Through his work at home, in London at Bart's, in Cambridge at the MRC Abnormal Haemoglobin Unit, in Augusta at the International Center for Abnormal Hemoglobins, in Rome at the Institute of Cellular Biology, Suku became respected and popular as a scientist in three continents. His example of dedicated hard work will remain an example to students of human biology in India and elsewhere. His memory will always be cherished by those of us who were privileged to know him and who will miss his regular Christmas greetings: We can only hope to become better for remembering him. To all his family we express our sincere sympathy and love.

Department of Haematology
University of London
London, England

L. Luzzatto
April 22, 1991

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2. Sukumaran, P.K., Merchant, S.M., Desai, M.P., Wiltshire, B.G., and Lehmann, H., *J. Med. Genet.*, 9:436, 1972.
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B-8 VINDHYA
ANUSHAKTI NAGAR
BOMBAY - 400 094
28th Feb. 1991.

Dear Dr. Luzzato

Thank you very much for your letter, I received on 25-2-91. I had already replied your earlier letter. I had enclosed two photographs which I presumed were taken at your place, plus a small remembrance which we had given in the Times of India, Bombay on the 11th day. Hope you have received them by now.

As desired by you I am sending a brief curriculum vitae. This was prepared at the time of his recent trip to England. A passport size photograph of Suku uncle is also enclosed herewith.

As for his personal biography he was one of the few persons I admired tremendously. He had earned a niche for himself in the field of haemoglobinopathies both on the national and international scene. The truly remarkable thing about him was he reached this position of eminence armed only with the most basic high school certificate - This was his

only academic qualification. Perhaps you know about it. I am unaware of any scientist from India & abroad who in similar circumstances achieved so much in our times. Later on he was an examiner for M.Sc and Ph.D at many universities in India; but on paper he didn't have a basic degree in science. He had a hard life strewn with stiff competition, opposition professional jealousies. There were many who had tried to put him down, but he was always magnanimous and generous towards his enemies.

I came to him in late 1973 and had almost stayed with him for 17 years. Many a time, I had listened enraptured with tears in my eyes to the bit bits of the story of how he came up. He used to tell me that one thing that had most influenced him as a young boy was a small booklet in Malayalam (ie our mother tongue) given by his father. The book was titled "VNDHIYODE PORUTHIYAVAR VEERATHIMAKKAL" - translated it means Brave are the

souls who fought against fate. It contained
the biographical sketch of some famous
men in science. His life story was a
testimonial to the idea contained in
that book. This indeed must have been
the moving spirit behind the lad of 16, who
left home after the 20th day ceremony
of his father's sad demise was over. With
only a pair of clothes and a matriculation
certificate (ie 11th std) he left home
telling his mother, he will come back
if he succeeds in getting a job. He
went to Coonoor in the Nilgiris in search
of a job at the Pasteur Institute, Coonoor
Eilat in where he met Prof. Hermann Lehmann
and Dr. Marie Crockston for the first
time) where his father was working
till his retirement. He left home
on 24th March 1936. He joined as
lab attendant at Pasteur Institute,
Coonoor on 3rd January, 1939. The
in between period he survived doing
odd jobs working as clerical cum
grafting rose plants at J. G. Frisch & Co,
as sales attendant at Jethimul Chamba-
dal and Co. and Sugamull Gubraj & Co.

Many a time working as lab attendant washing glassware the whole day (Pasteur Institute, Coonoor used to cater to the whole of southern India in those days) in the cold climate of Coonoor he used to curse his fate and wanted to leave this job and take up some other line. With this in mind during those period he had learned typing and had stood first in the Madras Presidency in the typing exam. But fate intervened, there was some first aid classes conducted by the St. John's Ambulance for the staff members of the Pasteur Institute. He took it very seriously and stood first in the exam conducted by them and is how he came to the notice of Col. Mulligan, who was the then Director of Pasteur Institute. He took a personal interest in him and taught him the ABC of laboratory work (I am enclosing a letter written by Col. Mulligan and Dr. Veeraraghavan who was also the Director, Pasteur Institute, later) to give a glimpse

into his personality. In 1952 he joined the Indian cancer Research centre, later renamed cancer Research Institute. He continued there till his retirement at 60. He was the first one to get an extension for 2 years in C.R.I. Thus retiring at the age of 62 he shifted to a new laboratory (at B.J. Wahia children's hospital), organising it from scratch continuing the work on the forefront of research in his chosen field. This brought the lab. international recognition being a reference lab for Thrombocytopenias in our country recognised by the W.H.O.

He had suffered a myocardial infarct in 1965 and the doctors gave him 5 years more to live. Again in 1989 he had another attack. He continued to work with rigid personal discipline, overcame the physical illness and at 70, he looked sprightly middle aged.

Apart from science, he was interested in literature, music and good cinema and could talk at length on many subjects. He was an ardent Philatelist and one of the

oldest members of the Philatelic Bureau
India.

He had a vast no. of friends in
India and abroad and maintained
relationships over 30, 40 years. He
never missed sending Christmas or
New year wishes regularly to his friends
in India and abroad. In fact even
during his latest hospitalisation, he
said that was the first thing he
wanted to do when he came back
home, but it was not to be.

He had a way with children
and he loved taking them out and
explaining things to them. I got
married in Dec. 1987 to a widow
(Ms. Charu Nair) with 2 children
Rohini 3 years & Aditi 6 years at that
time. He became their uncle too.
The essays written by my daughters
who are studying in I & II & IV std
will give you a glimpse of what
suku uncle meant to them. If they
could feel so attached to him in
three years time, you can well
imagine what he meant to others.

who had long associations with him.
All of us used to look forward eagerly
to his visits at the weekends to our home.
He was a wonderful human being,
a warm, kind and caring person
who brought sunshine into those
times he touched.

Thanking you and with kind regards,

Yours sincerely

Krishna

(Krishnaji)

Dear Dr. Luzzati

Thank you very much for your letter I received on 25-2-71. I had already replied your earlier letter, I had enclosed 2 photos which I presented ^{were} taken at your place plus a small obituary ^{of sufficient} remembrance which we had given in the Times of India, Bombay on the 11th Day. Hope you have received them by now.

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from India or abroad, who in
similar circumstances achieved so
much in our times. Later on he
was an examiner for M.Sc. and
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basic degree in science. He had
a hard life ^{strewn with} stiff competition, opposition
& professional jealousies. There were many
who had tried to put him down
but he was always magnanimous &
generous towards his enemies.

I came to him in late 1973, and
had almost stayed with him for 17 years.
Many an after dinner session ~~was~~
held. I had exhibited enraptured
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But fate intervened, there was some
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This indeed must have been the
moving spirit behind the lead
of 16 who left home after 10th
day mourning of his father's ^{sad} demise
was over. With only a pair of
clothes and a maintenance certificate
(ie 11th std) he left home telling his
mother he will come back if he
succeeds in getting a job. He went
to Coonoor in the Malabar in search
of a job (it is where the natl Prof.
Scholar & Dr. Manna worked for the
first time) at the Postern Institute
Coonoor where his father was working
till his retirement. He left home
on 1936 March 24th. He got a ^{part} time
job as lab attendant at Postern
Institute Coonoor on 3rd January
1939. The interwar period had
survived doing odd jobs working
as clerical and grafting rose plants
at J. G. Frisch & Co, as sales
attendant at Jethimul Charbald & Co
& Sugarmull Gulraj & Co. Many
a time working as lab attendant with
glassware the whole day (Postern Instn)

B. J

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He had suffered a myocardial
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every day during his last hospital stay, he said
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He had a way with children
& he loved taking them out &
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you an glimpse of what he
meant to them. If they could
feel so attached to him in three
years here you can well
imagine what he meant to others
who had long association with him.
I got married in Dec. 1987 to
a widow with 2 children Rohini &
Mani, & Aditi too. He became their
mole too. He was a ^{wonderful} warm &
kind & caring ^{person} who brought
smiles in to all those lives he
touched.

Dr. J. S. MURTHY
Ph. D.
PROFESSOR & ~~LECTURER~~



Phone: Office : 868951 Ext. 335

DEPARTMENT OF GENETICS
OSMANIA UNIVERSITY
Hyderabad - 500 007 (A. P.)
INDIA

22.2.91

Dear Dr. Krishnuja,

I thank you for your letter of to the Feb., which I could see now as was out of station for over a week.

The details on the academic career of Dr. Sukumaran are quite interesting and ~~exhaustive~~. I would however appreciate if these could be woven into an article containing a few aspects of his life and attitudes in general in a manner to bring out his personality fully.

I do hope you or Dr Naik or Dr Umadevi a will do it at an early date and send me.

I would however, need a good photograph for making a block, rather than the xerox copy sent by you.

I hope you will do the needful at your earliest.

Yours sincerely,



(J.S.MURTY)

Dr. A.P. Krishnaja
Molecular Biology and Agriculture Division
BARC,
BOMBAY-400 085.

c) Jethimul Chambalal
& Co, as sales attendant.

J. G. Fritsch & Co
(during the 3 months (1936) part of
second nursery - clerical work
(2) grafting)

Rose plants (1936)
6 months.

1936 March 24
left home

Sugamul & Gulraj

and Co. 1938
Pasli Instituti 1939 - January
3rd.

Berbeck college
London.

(1962)
(J. B. S. Haldane)

2

The fourth desa - Samgixi ration list
accompanying this letter will give you
most of the landmarks in his own words.

He had a tremendous capacity for
work. He set very high standards for himself
expected the same from his co-workers. I
think it was only in Prof. Lehmann's lab.
and his that they still ran all haemo-
globin samples for electrophoresis on paper
just. His electrophoretic patterns are
clearly differentiated without trailing. He
still used the paper electrophoretic apparatus
disregarded and fabricated from fish tanks.

To confirm the sickle cell anemia
findings by electrophoresis, he took leave
from DR1, spent his own money went
back to the Nilgiris and collected blood
from the 146 Todas. He knew most of the
Toda families, since he had studied the
serology of syphilis among them. The
1956 paper in Man is a result of this work.

He had studied more than 2000 cell
haemoglobin specimens.

His adventurous spirit is seen in the
paper. P. K. Sukumar et al. ABO Blood
groups in active cases of small pox.
Ind. J. Med. Sci. 20, 117-122, 1966, where
in he had collected blood from active
cases of small pox.

Besides the administration, planning and
conceptualisation of his projects, he was

personally involved in the voluminous
field and laboratory work carried out.

I would appreciate if you could
kindly return the copy of the list of
the ^{1st} ~~Sanjivani~~ ^{Sanjivani} ~~edition~~ ^{edition} after going
through it.