Professor Sohail Ahmad

(January 3, 1932 – March 2, 2008)

I. Early Life and Education

Professor Sohail Ahmad was born in Budaun, UP, India, on January 3, 1932. He studied at STS High School, Aligarh, and then went on to acquire higher degrees, viz.: (i) a Bachelor of Science degree (Chemistry, Botany, and Zoology) from Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) in 1952; (ii) a Master of Science degree in Zoology (Parasitology) from AMU in 1955; (iii) a Master of Science degree in Bacteriology from the Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie Mellon University), Pittsburgh, USA, in 1964; and (iv) a PhD degree in Microbiology from AMU in 1976.

II. Academic and Research Career

Professor Ahmad started his academic career with a teaching position at Delhi College (now Zakir Husain Delhi College – a constituent college of the University of Delhi) in 1958, before winning a graduate scholarship in 1962 for pursuing his second masters in bacteriology at the Carnegie Institute of Technology.

During his graduate studies at the Carnegie Institute of Technology (1962-1964), Professor Ahmad received summer appointments to work at the School of Medicine, University of Pittsburgh, with Professor Neils K. Jerne, who was a pioneer in the development of immune network theory, and who won a Nobel Prize for this work in 1984. Professor Ahmad's experience in working with Professor Jerne helped him to gain vital insights into antigens, antibodies, and the immune system.

After acquiring valuable training and knowledge in the US, Professor Ahmad returned to Delhi College in 1964, where he excelled in teaching and research.

In 1968, he joined the Department of Microbiology, Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College (JNMC), AMU, as a lecturer, and was appointed professor in 1983. He also served as chairman of the Department.

During his 26-year career at AMU, Professor Ahmad brought laurels to the University through his achievements in academics, and through his pioneering research on antigen-antibody interactions. Of particular note was his research on the diagnosis and prevention of parasitic diseases, whereby he and his team made a significant contribution to the body of work geared towards the development of vaccines for malaria (*P. falciparum*) and amoebiasis.

Professor Ahmad's early research won him a WHO travel fellowship to the UK, USA, and Canada in the mid 1970s. This enabled him to receive cutting-edge training at the London School of Tropical Medicine, Wellcome Research Laboratories (Beckenham, Kent), National Institutes of Health (NIH, Bethesda, Maryland), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Atlanta, Georgia), and the Department of Microbiology and Immunology at McGill University (Montreal, Quebec).

On his return to AMU, Professor Ahmad dedicated himself to teaching and research, and single-handedly established state-of-the-art parasitology and malaria laboratories, within the Department of Microbiology, with special funds granted to him by the Vice-Chancellor, and a recurring grant from the University Grants Commission (UGC).

He was invited to become co-investigator on an NIH-funded malaria research project in collaboration with the Department of Tropical Medicine and Medical Microbiology, University of Hawaii (1979-1985). This project, the first of its kind, generated critical knowledge about the epidemiology of *P. vivax* and *P. falciparum*, and resulted in the exchange/training of young research scholars.

Professor Ahmad in his laboratory at JNMC, AMU, in 1982

Professor Ahmad also received innumerable research grants from various other agencies such as the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, Department of Science and Technology (Government of India), Indian Council of Industrial and Scientific Research, Indian Council of Medical Research, and Lady Tata Memorial Trust, to name but a few.

In addition to being an outstanding teacher, loved and respected by his students and colleagues, Professor Ahmad was known internationally for his important contributions to research in parasitology and microbiology. He and his research scholars published over 200 articles in national and international journals of repute. He was invited to present his seminal research at numerous national and international conferences, workshops, and seminars. He successfully supervised around 50 PhD, MPhil, and MD students.

III. Recognition and Retirement

In 1987, Professor Ahmad received the prestigious Watumull Foundation Award (USA) and a gold medal for "research in the development of a vaccine for the immunologic control of Amoebiasis." Until his retirement from AMU in 1994, he remained actively involved in both teaching and research. Today, his students hold prestigious positions – ranging from research scientists and professors to cardiologists and surgeons – in India and abroad.

IV. Passing Away

Professor Ahmad passed away peacefully in his sleep at his home in Aligarh on March 2, 2008.

– By Dr. Saif Ahmad (Son)