Professor Hossein Mirshamsi; an Eternal Figure of Iran

Professor Hossein Mirshamsi joined the Beloved in the last parts of November 2008 in Tehran. The best eulogy for this man of knowledge is that which Rudaki, the 9 A.D. great Iranian poet, said about Shahid Balkhi: “From the count of two eyes one less And from the count of wisdom thousands more” (His loss for me in the physical sense was like losing one of my eyes, but deficiency in intellect on the basis of wisdom was way beyond annihilation of thousands of people).

In the pages of history, on national and international scales, there are influential men and their memories are eternal. Dr. Mirshamsi with the services he offered in different areas of microbiology especially vaccine production in Iran, became a luminary and his memory for scientists of this land and country, which is not separate from that worldly figure, will always be alive.

Mirshamsi was born in 1917 in Isfahan and there completed his primary and middle school education. Subsequently, he continued his education at the College of Veterinary Medicine of Tehran University and finished his work in 1940. After compulsory military service, he began work as an assistant at the Razi Institute of Hesarak’s microbiology research and production laboratories. In the year 1950 he traveled to the Pasteur Institute of Paris to obtain specialties in the fields of microbiology and immunology and after two years he returned to Iran. He worked and conducted research several times with use of scholarships from the American government in State Department of Health Laboratories of Boston and Albany and also several years with use of scholarships from WHO and FAO in virology laboratories of Houston School of Medicine and Surrey at U.K. Dr. Mirshamsi was technical assistant and head of research and production of serum and vaccines with medical application at the Razi Institute for approximately forty years.

What I personally heard from the late Mirshamsi regarding production details of serum and vaccines with human uses is thus:

Around 1994-45 due to World War II, the diphtheria vaccine was not imported to Iran and from this aspect the country was in distress. The minister of public health at the time requested the French Louis Delpi, head of the Pasteur Institute at the time, to pursue this matter at the Hesarak Institute. Dr. Delpi appointed Mirshamsi to this assignment and provided him the basic supplies. Dr. Mirshamsi accomplished this task. First, he began by making anti-diphtheria serum in horse and later he prepared the diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus vaccine with the Gaston Louis Ramon method he had learned from Dr. Rasstegaar, student of Dr. Ramon. This project was later expanded and finally years later it applied to all Iranian children and it continues to today. Later, as I witnessed, he invited the American Professor Sabin, discoverer of the poliomyelitis vaccine, to Iran around 1974 and with permission from the WHO he began making the edible polio vaccine. Later he prepared the measles, mumps, and rubella vaccines in his division. Production of these basic vaccines were very effective in securing the health of Iranian children and the Iranian Ministry of Health controlled the above mentioned all inclusive illnesses and was even able to help neighboring countries.

The other valuable work of Dr. Mirshamsi is preparation of the anti-rabies serum because Iran is one of the important countries where rabies is prevalent. From about 45 years ago, upon recommendation from the World Health Organization, the horse anti-rabies serum was prepared at Mirshamsi’s division and with collaboration with the Pasteur Institute of Tehran’s anti-rabies section with joint application of serum and anti-rabies vaccine, rabies’ casualties were drastically reduced.

Dr. Mirshamsi was a powerful writer. He published three books in Farsi in areas of general virology, immunology and prevention and vaccination and approximately 150 articles in reputable international journals in English and French. He was a member of the Iranian Academy of Medicine and Science and a member of the Third World Academy of Science. For years Mirshami was advisor and expert of the World Health Organization at the Pasteur Institute of Tunisia and in 1955 upon invitation from the World Health Organization, he founded the vaccine production laboratories in Jordan. In Iran he received numerous scientific prizes for his 50 years of service in research and science.

Services of Dr. Mirshamsi in the area of vaccine production in Iran are great deeds that will always remain and every year thousands of children are saved from untimely death. What can be done better than this? In May of 1996 to take part in the Office of International Epizootic (OIE) conference, I accompanied Dr. Mirshamsi to Paris. One day upon his recommendation we went to Montmartre, Parisian artistic neighborhood, and there a French artist painted our portraits. Later, Dr. Mirshami gave me his portrait and behind it is the dedication of his picture to me in his hand writing. Now, the readers will see both.

It is in Iranian mythology that when a child is born, a star lights up in the sky, and when he dies, this star is extinct. But the stars of some people like Dr. Mirshamsi become brighter after his decease.

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