

Friedrich Vogel

1925 – 2006



Professor Dr. Friedrich Vogel was born on 6 March 1925 in Berlin, Germany. He completed a normal secondary school diploma (Abitur) in 1943. He was conscripted and became Russian prisoner of war in 1945 and was later discharged on the grounds of ill-health. After returning to Berlin he commenced his medical studies at Humboldt University, Berlin and then he moved over to Free University, Berlin in 1948. Having completed his medical education and internship in 1953, he approached Professor Hans Nachtshiem, Director, Max Planck Institute, for training in human genetics, and got his doctorate in 1957. Professor JBS Haldane became his role model. In 1955, he christened the term pharmacogenetics. Vogel completed his habilitation in 1957 with a thesis on the heritability of the normal electroencephalogram (EEG) which was published as a monograph in 1958.

In 1958, Vogel spent a couple of months with Professor J V Neel at the Department of Human Genetics, University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, USA. In 1962, Vogel was appointed as Director, Institute of Anthropology and Human Genetics in Heidelberg. He devoted himself to work on chemical mutagenesis in mammals. In 1964, he was appointed as the editor of the Journal, *Humangentik* (later known as Human Genetics). He was a fellow at the Centre of Advanced Studies in Behavioural Science at Stanford, USA (1976-77).

Professor Vogel was closely associated with the erstwhile Anthropometry and Human Genetics Unit (recently split into (i) Biological Anthropology Unit and (ii) Human Genetics Unit) of the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI), Calcutta during 1966-71. During this period he visited ISI in several instalments.

In 1966, he carried out an extensive field work in collaboration with the anthropologists of the Institute to study the relation between ABO blood group polymorphisms and the incidence and virulence of small-pox. Again in 1969, he carried out anthropological field study at Purulia, in collaboration with the anthropologists of ISI, Calcutta. He delivered several lectures on various topics during 1966-71. Notable among them are (i) Chemical Mutagenesis, (ii) Association of ABO Blood groups and Leprosy, (iii) Genetic Enzyme Variants, (iv) Infanticide and Polygamous Marriages.

Professor Vogel delivered the Fourth Annual Convocation address entitled “ Human Genetics and the Biological Future of Man” at the Indian Statistical Institute, held on 12 April 1966. In his Convocation address, he opined that “the evolution of man is being in full and rapid progress and has speeded up recently due to change in mutation frequency as well as natural selection”. ...The former “is due to ionizing radiation and chemical mutagens” ...and the latter “is due to infectious disease and malnutrition” ...and he continued, and illustrated “the action of natural selection in man” through his works with the ISI colleagues that “the ABO blood group polymorphisms influence the susceptibility to as well as severity and outcome of different infectious diseases”. ...He stated that “the persons with blood groups A and AB suffer more severely and die more frequently from small-pox than persons with blood groups B and O”. He also discussed about the “advantages and disadvantages” of “relaxation of natural selection, ...and that “it would be difficult to say which of them would predominate in the long run”.

Professor Vogel's scientific career spans almost forty years. He was a rationalist as well as generalist bubble with new ideas. He was an outstanding academician combining professional competence with a profound knowledge of philosophy, history, art and literature. He loved to travel to exotic places and kept contact with many individuals world wide. His research topics were broad and diverse, to wit, his dissertation at Free University in Berlin was on psychosomatic influences on eczema; and, his thesis at Max Planck Institute was on the heritability of the normal electroencephalogram (EEG). He also did research to examine mutation rate in retinoblastoma (gene). He applied mutation-selection models to estimate the incidence of retinoblastoma among newborns; analysis of chemical mutagenesis in mammals. He also did work on the estimation of numbers of human genes, the mutational process based on amino acid substitution in haemoglobin; the basis of multi-factorial inheritance, human behavioural genetics; influence of blood groups on susceptibility to disease and its evolutionary context, genetic counselling, and so on.

He had profound influence in the development of Human Genetics in Germany. He was a prolific writer. He published a dozen books and more than 300 research papers. His *magnum opus* was his text book *Human Genetics: problems and approaches*, co-authored by Arno Motulsky. Other notable books are: *Chemical Mutagenesis in Mammals and Man* (with Rohrborn); *Ist Unser Schikhsal Mitgeboren?* (with Propping); *Genetic Family Advice* (with Fuhrmann) in German language. *Genetics and the Electroencephalogram*; and, his seminal book in German language entitled, *Lehrbuch der allgemeinen Humangenetik*. He was also one of the founders (and editor) of the journal *Human Genetics* (Springer-Verlag).

In 1986, he organized the International Congress of Human Genetics in Berlin. Professor Vogel retired at the age of 68 years from the Institute of Anthropology and Human Genetics, Heidelberg, Germany. He was associated

with various scientific organizations. He had received international recognition through many prestigious honours and prizes including the Federal Cross Merit; the Hans Berger Prize of the German EEG Society; Medal of Honour of the German Human Genetic Society (GfH Medal of Honour), and the Honorary Doctorate degree of the Free University of Berlin.

On 5 August 2006, Friedrich Vogel passed away. Professor Vogel was a legendary figure and the doyen of Human genetics in Germany. He will be deeply respected and remembered by the posterity for his academic prowess and trail blazing research.

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