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Editorial

Obaid Siddiqi at 80 and Neurogenetics in India

It is a privilege to edit this special issue of the *Journal of Neurogenetics* celebrating the 80th birthday of Obaid Siddiqi (Obaid), one of the early leaders of neurogenetics. The issue also implicitly celebrates the Department of Biological Sciences at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), Mumbai, set up 50 years ago by Obaid and a handful of colleagues. The impact of the department (originally called the Molecular Biology Unit) can be seen in the fruits of that endeavor in the form of many institutions and individuals who are leaders in molecular biology and neuroscience all over the world. Obaid was the original nucleating force that attracted and initiated several influential Indian biologists, and thereby played a major role in the development of modern biology in India. His easy recognition of excellence and generous support of young scientists of potential are legendary. VijayRaghavan (Vijay) in his introductory remarks sets the historical background of Obaid's science and the long-lasting effect of this in India, through a process that he calls its "cultural transmission."

In the early 1960s at the Tata Institute, Obaid started work on biochemical genetics of *Aspergillus* with an assorted set of people, but serious research with Vijay Sarthy ensued later with his seminal work on bacterial recombination in collaboration with Maurice Fox. It was not long after Benzer's review on behavioral genetics that Obaid decided to move to neuroscience and that began with a year's sabbatical at Caltech. In these years, Obaid played a major role in the emergence of neuroscience and particularly neurogenetics in India. He attracted diverse intellects, individuals, and personalities who also made key contributions. Notably Pabitra Maitra, a yeast geneticist, and P. Babu, a physicist turned biologist who worked with Gellman, Brenner, and Lewis (all subsequent Nobel laureates) and founded one of India's first biotech companies, who were intellectual anchors to TIFR biologists inspired by Obaid's soaring spirit.

Some crucial December courses Obaid organized significantly influenced many in India and brought the TIFR group into easy contact with many of the most vigorous intellects of the time. Sydney Brenner, John Nichols, Allen Pearlman, and Graeme Mitchison taught in a 1974 course on "Development and Neurobiology" attended by one of us (K.S.K.). An International Brain Research Organization (IBRO) neuroscience course in Goa, 1982, where Jan Jansen, John Nicholls, and Dennis

Baylor taught, had huge influence, including as it did on Krishnan, Vijay, Veronica Rodrigues, M. K. Mathew, and several future teachers and leaders of neuroscience in India among the students. An international fly meeting in Mumbai in 1979 was lauded by Jeff Hall, the founding editor of *Journal of Neurogenetics*, as one of the most "salutory" meetings that he attended, and accompanied by workshops taught by Mary Lou Pardue and Garcia Bellido, Jose Campos Ortega, and Nick Strausfeld, among others. The proceedings of that early conference is a much referred publication from Plenum (<http://www.worldcat.org/title/development-and-neurobiology-of-drosophila-proceedings-of-the-international-conference-on-development-and-behavior-of-drosophila-melanogaster-held-at-the-tata-institute-of-fundamental-research-bombay-india-december-19-22-1979/oclc/473578343?ht=edition&referer=di>). The high standard of organization, participation, and content of these early meetings ensured the success of the large number of TIFR-sponsored/associated meetings and workshops, including the now well-established series of Mahabaleshwar Seminars and IBRO-sponsored neuroscience courses.

In this issue, we present a collection of perspectives and research articles in neuroscience authored by largely by participants and invitees to a conference held in the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS) last January to honor Obaid's legacy (<http://ncbs.res.in/Genes-to-Olfaction-Videos>). Here, Satpal Singh gives his personal account of the early work on ts paralitics in Obaid's laboratory. Gaiti Hasan essays her reminiscences of an important period in the mid-1970s, when Veronica Rodrigues (<http://www.sciencemag.org/content/330/6010/1493.short>) joined Obaid and what began as screen for chemosensory mutants over several years expanded to all of the work on *Drosophila* from Obaid and colleagues, including his recent interest in learning and memory.

John Carlson's note exemplifies the typical Obaid, highlighting Obaid's natural generosity and his role as a trendsetter in international collaboration, which opened many doors to his students, colleagues, and international visitors. Martin Heisenberg's reflection is generally Obaidesque. The original contributions from Erich Buchner, Barry Ganetzky, and Chun-Fang Wu endorse Obaid's spirit of international cooperation and those by Sanyal, Raghu, and Ray are from a generation scientifically

once removed from Obaid, but still deeply touched by his direct influence.

We enjoyed assembling these tributes to Obaid on the occasion of his 80th birth year and wish him many more enjoyable and active years in neurogenetics, the one thing he loves to continue doing and talking about more than anything else.

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