

# Prof. Hari Shankar Asopa: A Doyen in Surgery (1932–2023)

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One morning during APSICON 1984 at Lonawala, I was standing in the lobby of the conference venue meeting fellow delegates and seniors and screening across the arrangements. Suddenly, I found a short-statured person standing with a briefcase, searching for someone in front of the area designated for posters and other advertisements. While I was passing by, he called me and looked at the board, which was at a height beyond his reach. He instructed me to stop and took out a large envelope containing several black and white photographs and another transparent packet containing drawing pins. Observing my height, he remarked politely, “Let me take advantage of your height,” to which I instantly agreed. He asked me to fix the pictures on the board with drawing pins and started handing over the photographs one by one in a sequence, which I fixed on the whole board. While attaching the pictures, I realized that they were of one-stage Asopa hypospadias repair, which I studied and drew in my notes during the MCh course. After completing the process to his satisfaction, he commented, “Thank you, young man! I am Dr. Asopa” (► **Fig. 1**). I was overwhelmed. He shook hands with me and asked: “Do you want to ask any questions regarding the procedure as that will enable me to assess how clear I am in my explanation to the audience?” I hesitantly asked a few details, conscious of the personality in front of me. In the end, he gently smiled and said, “Good luck to you for your bright future; if you need any help, meet me unhesitantly.” Astounded, I forgot to take a picture with him. Thereafter, I had several opportunities to interact with him and assisted him thrice during live operative workshops. Later, I received the “Asopa Award” from him at Aligarh (► **Fig. 2**). What a great day for me! He played a vital role in creating interest in me to treat patients with hypospadias, which, to date, is one of my favorite procedures.



**Fig. 1** Prof. Hari Shankar Asopa, MS, FRCS, FRCSEd, FACS, FAMS, FICS, FNASc, DSc (1932–2023).

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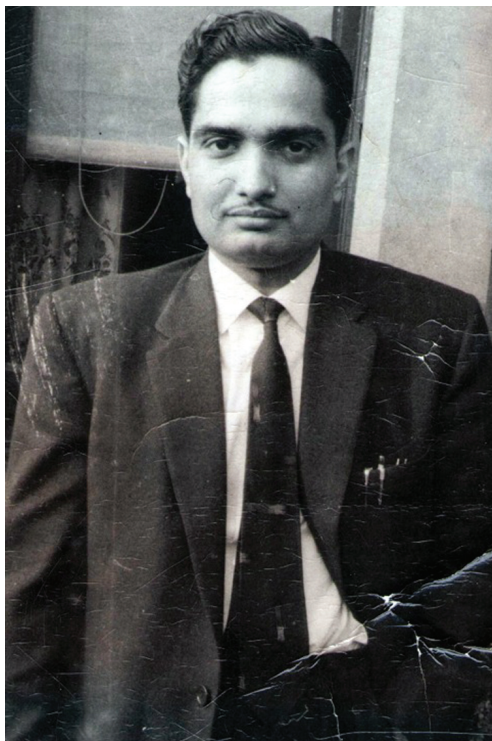
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**Fig. 2** The author receiving the Asopa Award from Dr. H.S. Asopa himself.



**Fig. 3** Family hierarchy.



**Fig. 4** Dr. H.S. Asopa passed MS (Surgery) in 1964.

Dr. Hari Shankar Asopa was born on July 3, 1932 at Bikaner. His parents were Dr. and Mrs. S.N. Asopa (Physician). Throughout, he remained connected to his family and discharged all his duties along with his beloved wife (► **Fig. 3**). In 1957, he stood first in MBBS from S.N. Medical College, Agra University, and received several medals, including the Chancellor Medal. He completed his MS (Surgery) from the same institute in 1964 (► **Fig. 4**). Thereafter, he completed his FRCS from England and Edinburgh. After completing his studies, he joined the Department of General Surgery, S.N. Medical College, Agra, and later on served as Professor and Head of the Department of General Surgery at MLB Medical College, Jhansi, for 7 years. He was bestowed Professor Emeritus by S. N. Medical College, Agra, in 1989.

An elegant personality, he always dressed soberly. A thorough gentleman with a mild voice and a sweet smile, he was very dignified. In meetings, he would remain practically unnoticed unless somebody came and invited him. He was like a tower among the audience because of his high academic stature. When at work, he was serious, dedicated, sincere, and totally focused. He could motivate and influence people with strong evidence-based rationality for his innovations. During academic presentations, he would emphasize the vascularity and minute details of his technique. He used to organize workshops regularly in his hospital and invite his fellow



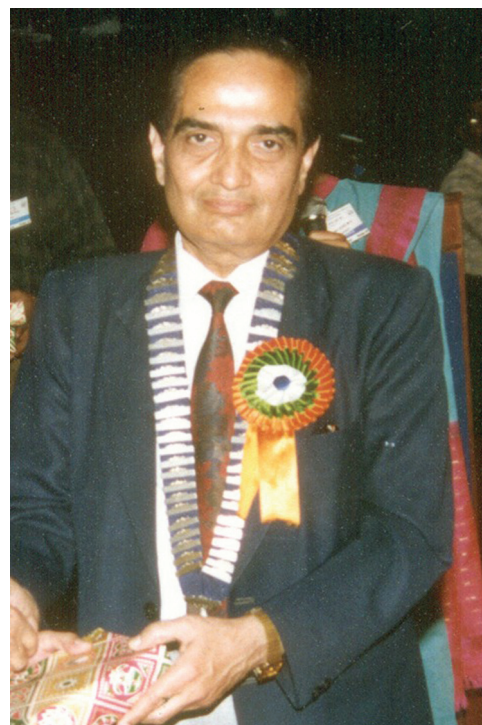
**Fig. 5** Dr. H.S. Asopa at a workshop in 2009.

stalwarts from different parts of the world (►Fig. 5). In live workshops, he would check the instruments personally and would insist on laying them in the proper sequence as instructed by him. He would also talk about the failures, lessons learned, and rectification. If asked about fistula, his favorite sentence was, “Only that surgeon will not have urethral fistula which has never done a hypospadias surgery.”

Dr. H.S. Asopa invented a one-stage operation for hypospadias using a transverse preputial skin tube and published his research on it in 1971. His original technique was accepted rapidly by surgeons all over the world by urologists, pediatric surgeons, plastic surgeons, and general surgeons. It found a place in international journals, references, and textbooks.

Two further operations devised were also popular as ASOPA II (vascularized double island), published in 1984, and “ASOPA-90 VERSION.” These have found a place in several international texts and reference books. “Neourethra” made by this technique is also used in the most difficult and long urethral stricture and congenital short urethra. He also invented an operation for the management of pancreatic stump: pancreaticojejunostomy with invagination of a spatulated pancreatic stump into a jejuna pouch.

He served as the National President of the Associations of Surgeons of India in 1996 (►Fig. 6). He was Past President and Honorary Lifetime President of the International Society on Hypospadias and Intersex Disorders. This society awards the “Asopa Lecture” to eminent international authorities at its biennial conferences. Thereafter, he described another operation in the mid-1990s for stricture urethra, published



**Fig. 6** President of the Association of Surgeons of India (1996).

in the journal *Urology* in 2001 by Elsevier Science Inc., Philadelphia, which is being followed universally by urologists worldwide and has made urethral stricture surgery easy



**Fig. 7** Awarded DSC (Honoris Causa) by B.R. Ambedkar University in 1995.

and safe. It is known as dorsal inlay urethroplasty or the Asopa technique. This technique is recognized as a major advancement in urethroplasty.

Dr. Asopa was invited to give talks on his operations at both national and international conferences. He demonstrated these operations at workshops in over 50 institutes and preconference workshops in India and abroad. He established the Asopa Hospital and Research Centre in Agra. As a committed teacher, he pursued his passion for teaching by teaching postgraduate MS surgeons and by running a 3-year postgraduate course of DNB in General Surgery and Family Medicine accredited by the National Board of Examination of the Government of India.

Prof. Hari Shankar Asopa was awarded many prizes, memberships, and fellowships. A few prominent ones are Col. Pandalai Oration of the Association of Surgeons of India in 1991 and DSc. (Honoris Causa) by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar University, Agra, in 1995 (►Fig. 7). He received the Dr. B.C. Roy National Award, 1991, from the Hon. President of India, Mr. K.R. Narayanan (►Fig. 8) and the Eminent Medical Teacher Award from Hon. President of India Dr Shankar Dayal Sharma at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in 1996 (►Fig. 9). He was honored with Hunterian Professorship of the Royal College of Surgeons of England in 1996–1997. He received the Col. Sangam Lal Oration and Gen. Amir Chand Oration awards, both from the National Academy of Medical Sciences of India. He also received recognition from the Asia Society of Pediatric Urology in 2000 for outstanding contributions to pediatric urology. He was also a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons and the College of Surgeons, Sri Lanka.

He was known not only in the field of surgery but also as a philanthropic doctor. He was extremely empathetic in regard to poor, downtrodden people and served them free of cost. He has left behind a rich professional legacy through his children and students who either went on to chair several



**Fig. 9** Dr. H.S. Asopa receiving the Eminent Medical Teacher Award, 1996.

departments across the country or are very well established in practice. His unquenchable brilliance and undaunted spirit shall live in the minds of innumerable students taught by him and in the minds of grateful patients treated by him.

He certainly had a very fruitful and meaningful life, be it family, academic, professional, or administrative. As a legend, he commanded very high respect among his colleagues and students. His passing away signals the end of an era and the loss of an exemplary and iconic personality. Dr. H.S. Asopa will be fondly remembered by everyone. His physical void will always be felt, but his love and affection shall live in our hearts forever.



**Fig. 8** Dr. H.S. Asopa receiving the B.C. Roy Award, National Award, from the Honorable President of India in 1991.