



Milestones

Dr Vithal Nagesh Shirodkar and the Cervical Cerclage

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In the 1950's, when second trimester spontaneous, abortion was a mysterious entity, there were some therapies described, but none of them yielded satisfactory results. The relatively rare but distressing problem called for some straight thinking from a brilliant mind.

Dr V N Shirodkar (Figure 1) was just the man who brought a refreshingly fresh insight into the problem. He studied the cervix in the non-pregnant and pregnant states, understanding the changes in anatomy and physiology. He was particularly interested in the changing nature of the cervix in normal pregnancy from a fibrous one to a

dynamic muscular organ. His answer to the problem of habitual second trimester abortion was a surgery which put him and India firmly on the map of operative obstetrics and gynecology.

In 1955, Dr V N Shirodkar described the cervical cerclage operation, a surgery which has stood the greatest test of all – time. He innovated special instruments for the repair of the incompetent cervix. (Figure 2) There have been a number of modifications, most notably that by McDonald, but



Dr. V. N. Shirodkar (1899-1971)
(Figure 1)

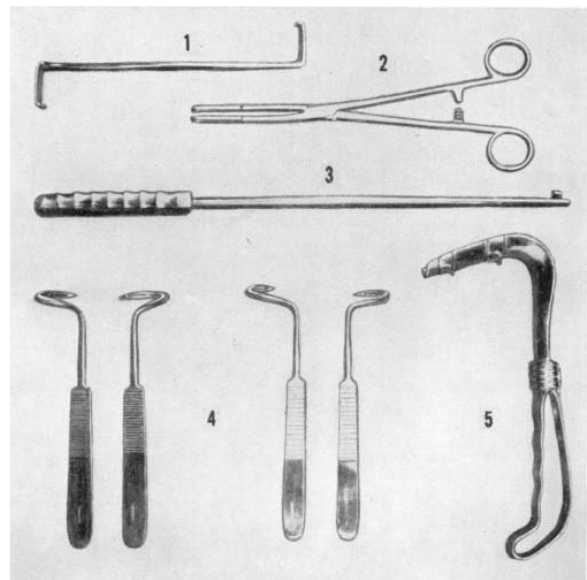


Figure 2. Instruments for the repair of incompetent cervix, 1. Retractor, 2. Sponge-holding forceps, 3. Fasciotome, 4. Shirodkar needles, right and left (two sizes); 5. Non-slip speculum

the original surgery is a masterpiece. He described his operation at the international platform in Paris in 1951 and in Naples, in 1956. The Italian connection was, of course, strengthened by the fact that a Hollywood star was also successfully operated upon by him with the same technique. He was astute enough to realize that his operation was not a panacea for all habitual abortions. He clearly laid out the conditions where the operation was most likely to be useful and where it would not work. Even as we battle on today about the role of cervical cerclage in modern day obstetrics, it would be worth taking a leaf out of the master's book.

The operation and the thought behind it probably came from Dr Shirodkar's keen sense of questioning everything that was routine. He wrote in the preface to his monograph, "With all due respect to the old masters, I did not reconcile myself to some of the operative procedures which fell far short of the ideal; ideas came to my mind for improving the time-honoured methods."¹

Dr V N Shirodkar, born in 1899 in Shiroda, Goa, graduated from the Grant Medical College and went to the UK to train further and obtained his FRCS in 1931. As he states, the exposure to the

West allowed him to interact with men of the stature of Professor J Chassar Moir, Victor Lack, J D Murdoch and many others¹. Upon his return he joined the JJ Group of Hospitals in 1935 as Honorary Obstetrician and Gynecologist. His career was a distinguished one and the Shirodkar's Stitch was only a part of the story. He was an inimitable teacher and innovator. He had a huge clinical practice including the royalty, as well those from all strata of society. Amongst his many other surgical contributions, one counts the operations for prolapse repair, tuboplasty and creation of a neovagina. Besides being a busy practitioner, he published widely and took an interest in social medicine. He was a member of the Shantilal Shah Committee on abortions and also established the Family Planning Association in India. He was honored by the Indian Government in 1971 with the Padma Vibhushan².

References

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2. Shah DS, Shroff SA, Vaz I, D'Souza A. A Genealogy of Generations: The history of the Mumbai Obstetrics and Gynaecological Society. Mumbai: Mumbai Obstetrics and Gynaecological Society; 2003.