

Dr Jaswant Singh Neki

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Abstract

Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki (1925–2015) is amongst the foremost psychiatrists of India. He has been variously described as a world-renowned mental health expert, a noted metaphysical poet, a teacher par excellence, and an excellent humane person of international repute. He joined his graduate course in medicine and surgery from King Edward Medical College, Lahore and completed graduation from Medical College, Amritsar.¹ He passed his MA (Psychology) from Aligarh Muslim University. Later he passed DPM exam from All India Institute of Mental Health, Bangalore. He held high academic and administrative positions including Consultant - WHO, Geneva and UNDP S-E Asia.

Keywords: J S Neki, Guru-Chela relationship, Kairos, Poet, Cross cultural psychotherapy.

Introduction

Dr Neki was born in village Murid, Distt. Jhelum (Pakistan), on 27th August, 1925. His father, S. Hari Gulab Singh and his mother, Smt. Sita Wanti were both God-fearing individuals.¹ When he was an infant, his parents shifted to Quetta (Baluchistan). He joined Khalsa High School in Quetta, from where he matriculated in 1941 securing the highest marks in entire Baluchistan and setting up a new record. He then joined Forman Christian College, Lahore, for his premedical studies. There he enjoyed two merit scholarships – one was granted by the University and the other was granted by the college. In his FSc (Medical) exam, he stood second in the university. For his graduate course in medicine and surgery, he joined King Edward Medical College, Lahore. In medical college too he received a merit scholarship granted by the Govt. of Baluchistan. When the country was partitioned, in 1947, he left Lahore and joined Medical College, Amritsar, where he completed his medical studies and graduated in 1949.

After medical graduation, he worked first as a House Physician, then as Asstt. Registrar, and then as a Demonstrator in Medical College, Amritsar. He also had a short stint, in between, as Demonstrator in Christian Medical College, Ludhiana. While teaching there, he passed his MA (Psychology) exam as a teacher candidate from Aligarh Muslim University. In this exam he secured First Division and first position in the University. He passed his DPM exam from All-India Institute of Mental Health, Bangalore, and Mysore University, in 1958. He passed DPM with double distinction and again set up a new record to become a psychiatrist. In 1955, he married Kanwerjit, the eldest daughter of his own Professor, Lt. Col. Dr Gurbuxsh Singh Kanwer and he had two children.

Dr NN Wig recalled him as one of the finest psychiatrists India has produced². He said he was one of those who laid the foundation of this discipline of psychiatry in India². As a psychiatrist, rising through the ranks, he became Prof. & Head of Psychiatry Department at the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi¹. He

worked there for about a decade. Then he was appointed Director of the Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, Chandigarh. He spent next three years there. From there, he was picked up by the World Health Organization, Geneva, as a consultant for a project in Africa. He served in Africa for over four years (1981-1985)¹. He came back home in 1985, and then had been engaged in private practice. In between, he also had a short engagement with the United Nations Development Programme and United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse (South-East Asia).

Belonging to a devout religious family Dr Neki has always had keen interest in religion. Like his family, he also has unbigoted, liberal views. During his student life, he became President of the All-India Sikh Students Federation and organized training camps for the Sikh youth in the Sikh lore.¹ He is a well-recognized metaphysical poet in Punjabi. He has contributed more than ten volumes of original verse. His opus magnum is his autobiography in verse¹. He also writes powerful, inspiring prose as evidenced by his books *Achetan di Leela*, *Meri Sahitak Swajeevani* and *Ardas*.

Backed by an excellent academic career in Medicine, Psychology and Psychiatry, he represented India at many an international forums, chaired important sessions of international professional conferences, delivered key-note addresses, earned numerous Fellowships, held office in international bodies and Visiting Professorship at foreign universities. The vast experience he thus gained into human psyche shaped the poet in him in many ways.³ He has won several prestigious awards in literature. Commissioned by Guru Nanak Dev University, he wrote *The Spiritual Heritage of the Punjab* which traces the evolution of spiritual thought and practice from the pre-Aryan times up to Guru Gobind Singh. He has represented Sikh community at various international forums including The Parliament World Religions 1993, UNESCO Conference on Religion and World Peace 1998, UNESCO Centre Catalunya Conference on Universal Ethics 1998, World Thanksgiving Conference 1999 and peace meeting of religions invited by

the Pope and held in Vatican in 2011. He breathed his last at his home in New Delhi on September 11, 2015.¹

Contributions of J S NEKI

He is a psychiatrist of international repute, known for his cross-cultural enquiries into human behavior³. Some of the prominent publications of J S Neki are as follows¹

1. Witchcraft and psychotherapy⁴
2. Psychiatry in East Africa⁵
3. Ausar ("Kairos"): and its place in creative psychotherapy⁶
4. Medical ethics: a viewpoint from the developing world⁷
5. Sahaja: an Indian ideal of mental health⁸
6. Psychotherapy in India: past, present, and future⁹
7. A reappraisal of Guru-Chela Relationship as a Therapeutic Paradigm¹⁰
8. Psychiatric education and the social role of the psychiatrist in developing South-East Asian countries¹¹
9. Yoga and psychoanalysis¹²

Positions Held¹

1. Dr Neki became Prof. & Head of Psychiatry Department at the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi and occupied that chair for about a decade (1968-1978).
2. Then he was appointed Director of the Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, Chandigarh where he spent three years (1978-1981).
3. Then he was picked up by the World Health Organization, Geneva, as a consultant for a project in Africa where he served for over four years (1981-1985).
4. He also had a short engagement with the United Nations Development Programme and United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse (South-East Asia).
5. For one year he was Chairman of the Board of Consultants constituted by the Delhi Gurdwara Management Committee for setting up of an Institute of Medical Sciences.
6. He was also Professor of Eminence in Religious studies at the Punjabi University, Patiala.
7. Dr. Neki served on the Advisory Boards of several National and International organisations.
8. He had been a member of the jury (Punjabi) for Sahitya Akademy Awards.
9. He was also a member of the Advisory Committee (Punjabi) for Jnan Peeth Award.
10. He was one of the past Chairmen of Punjabi Akademy, Chandigarh.

Awards³ -

1. Sahitya Akademy Award (1979) for his contribution to Punjabi literature¹
2. Bhai Vir Singh Award (1978).
3. Punjabi Sahit Samikhyha Board Award (1981)
4. Asian Memorial Award (1984).
5. Shiromani Sahitkar Award (1986)
6. Punjabi Sahit Academy Dhaliwal Award (1988)

7. Punjabi Academy, Delhi, Waris Shah Award (1991)
8. Punjabi Academy Bal-Sahitkar Award (1994)
9. Punjabi Academy, Delhi, Award for Best Poetry Book of the Year (2001)
10. Guru Nanak Dev University conferred on him PhD honourous causa for his contribution to literature¹.

Conclusion

Dr J S Neki will always be remembered as one of the most eminent name in the history of Indian psychiatry. Through his professional and literary works he has highlighted the importance of culture in psychotherapy. He has significantly helped to formulate an Indian perspective of mental health in accordance to Indian culture and based on cultural beliefs. He proposed guru-chela relationship as a model for therapy in Indian patients unlike therapist-patient relationship in western psychotherapy. With the help of his valuable contributions in various organizations of international repute and by working on multiple international projects, he made Indian psychiatry reach the international stage. He is an inspiration for the younger generations and will always be remembered with a lot of respect and affection for his contribution to Indian and international psychiatry.

Acknowledgment

Nil.

Conflict of interest

Nil.

Sources of funding

Nil.

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