

OBITUARY

TRIBUTE TO A LUMINARY – DR. M A MAJEED KHAN

Zia Nadeem



It is somewhat ironic that the first issue of the Telangana journal of psychiatry, which represents the newly created Telangana branch of IPS, should carry an obituary of one its chief architects and its very prominent "bidda"!

Dr. M A Majeed Khan, or in short Dr. M A M Khan, was the face of Psychiatry, not only in erstwhile AP and South India but also in India. He was not only instrumental in introducing Psychiatry in Hyderabad at a time when not many had even heard its name, but also a pioneer in psychiatric treatment modalities. He was not only a beloved teacher, but also a keen student. He was not only a master communicator himself but also a facilitator and moderator par excellence. He was not only a wonderful doctor, but also a 'patient' counsellor. He was not only an impressive speaker who kept his audience spell bound, but also a keen and observant

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listener. He not only loved speaking, he was also a treat to speak to. There was never a dull moment with him - whether it was on the innumerable picnics with his extended family, or with the younger psychiatrists at various conferences within India and abroad. If my late dad loved to be with him, so did my young nephews who would cherish his company.

Dr. M A M Khan enjoyed every moment of his life which he lived on his terms, and made sure he left this material world when the call from his Creator reached him, more or less on his terms. He had written copiously, and had spoken profusely about the vanity of ICU care in old age and serious illnesses in various media and forums; and when his turn came, his treating Physician refused to take him to ICU as apparently Dr. Khan had instructed and requested him, as an advance directive, that he should not be shifted to any ICU if he was to become gravely ill. He was always a family man; and when the end came at his home on 10th May 2015, he was caringly and poignantly surrounded by his loving wife of 54 years of cherished companionship, by his younger daughter, his youngest sister, a granddaughter, his work colleague of several years, two nephews (a total of five doctors) and a small army of faithful attendants. Although his breathing had become laboured towards the end, it appeared as though he was

determined to draw every breath that he was given in his life gracefully.

Born in Nizamabad within a middle class family of a Railway Officer, Dr. Khan moved to Hyderabad and finished his schooling from Chaderghat High School – a school of high repute in those days. He later joined Osmania Medical College to finish his MBBS in 1959. He was then offered a Govt job, which he readily accepted, and was posted to Bichkunda – a remote hamlet in Nizamabad district, where he became so popular that people visited him in Hyd even after 40 years. The interesting stories emanating from his rich experience gathered whilst in Bichkunda resonate in the younger generation of his family even today. Although he was doing very well in his job, there was a restlessness about him that forced him to take off in a cargo ship from Cochin to reach the greener pastures in England. Prudhoe Hospital in Prudhoe-Upon-Tyne was his training ground that launched him into a lifelong, celebrated career of Psychiatry where he honed his skills under some of the psychiatric stalwarts of those days. Again his story book has a collection of the most captivating tales of his teachers, colleagues and patients from England, which he would regale to an attentive and rapturous audience occasionally. He returned to Hyderabad in 1965 armed with a DPM from the Royal College of Psychiatrists, which was converted into founder membership of the college in 1971, when it received its Royal Charter. Faced with the dilemma of returning or not from UK few years ago, I had approached him for advice. He simply told me, “I returned because I did not want to spend my old age in a Care Home, cared for by unknown nurses!” That he never got old in India is another thing!

During the setting up of a modest practice in Himayathnagar, Dr. Khan used to accommodate his poor patients from villages in the large and unused garage of my grandmother’s spacious house - my first brush with psychiatric patients! He personally tasted the bitter aspects of stigma against mental illness when he noticed that he was hardly invited to any wedding parties; and that his rich patients used to park their cars at least a kilometre away from his clinic, in order to conceal their visit to a Psychiatrist from prying eyes. That stirred him to start his fight against stigma and he became convinced that psycho-education of the masses was the only way forward. He began writing newspaper columns in popular dailies like Deccan Chronicle, The Hindu, News time and Siasat. Siasat alone published his article every week for the past 40 years, until a week before he left us. He appeared in radio talks, numerous TV shows, Open University programmes, corner meetings, MESCO lecture series, public lectures through HUTS and Human Welfare Society and several other platforms. He went on a spree to reduce stigma, that too with a vengeance. If psychiatry and

psychiatrists and mentally ill patients are acceptable today, it is largely due to Dr. Khan’s singular efforts which should stand out in his life achievements.

Dr. Khan started the City Nursing Home at Lakdi ka pul in 1970, which later shifted to Himayathnagar. It was not just the first private psychiatric in-patient unit in the twin cities, it was a temple of learning and it became the launch pad for several noted psychiatrists in the city today. While reducing stigma and promoting mental health awareness was his prime mission in life, the other causes that were close to his heart were postgraduate psychiatry training and education, mental health legislation, suicide prevention, study of personality disorders and ethnocentrism, and latterly classification systems in Psychiatry especially DSM V.

During CME programmes, he would encourage young PG students to raise issues and ask questions and would never miss a training session for juniors. In order to introduce the young Turks to the international legends of Psychiatry, he organised a huge conference of the Royal College of Psychiatrists in Hyderabad in 1996. This was the largest regional meeting outside UK, and his personal charm and acquaintance with the Senior Fellows and Academicians in UK worked through to attract the then President of the College, Prof Bob Kendell, along with legends like Dr. Robin Murray, Dr. Michael Rutter, Dr. David Goldberg, Dr. Shon Lewis, Prof Eve Johnstone, Prof David Cunningham Owens and Prof Dinesh Bhugra among others to Hyderabad. Many years later several of the attendees would still remember his hospitality and the grand conference. He was a keen observer. Once at an International workshop on OCD in Bengluru, he was chairing an afternoon session, and listening to the speakers, but the posture that was adopted led me to believe that he had drifted off to sleep after a sumptuous conference lunch. At the end of the speakers’ presentation, he got up to summarise the proceedings, and he surprised everybody by his succinct synopsis, and put me to shame for even thinking he had nodded off!

He fought fiercely against the enforcement of Mental Health Act 1987, and appealed to the Parliamentary Select Committee which was headed by Shri Atal Behari Vajpayee in early 1990s to review the same. The Committee visited Dr. Khan’s nursing home, and Shri Vajpayee was reminded of certain provisions in the bill, reading which he exclaimed, “This bill will never see the light of the day as long as I am in the parliament”. Unfortunately the bill was passed and the Act enforced in April 1993.

He established Sahaya – a suicide prevention phone helpline – again a first in AP, and ran it with the help of volunteers from his own house for a number of years. This contribution was recognised by Befrienders’

International and he was made the President of Befrienders' India. He was also the founder President of Human Understanding & Tolerance Society (HUTS), a Society of Psychiatrists to promote Mental Health Awareness. He was a member of the Academic Council of College of Business Administration of Osmania University, where he had organized several workshops for Management students in Osmania University. He was the Founder member of Sultan ul Uloom Educational Society. He was the Emeritus Professor of Psychiatry at Deccan Medical College.

He leaves behind his wife Dr. (Mrs) D. Khan and two daughters, two sons-in law and four grandchildren.

He was bestowed with so many honours that it would be difficult to enlist them here. Prominent however, among them were the Fellowships in UK, USA and Australia, and several travelling Professorships to Muscat and Australia among others. His celebrated professional and personal life's most important contribution was the indelible memories he left behind as a compassionate and caring gentleman and the hearts that he touched across the continents.

“Dear Dr. Khan, You are missed, you are loved and you will forever be remembered”.

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