

Dr. N. N. Wig

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Abstract

Dr. Narendra Wig (1930– 2018) is amongst the foremost psychiatrists of India. Dr. Wig has been variously described as a world-renowned mental health expert, a compassionate psychiatrist, a teacher par excellence, and an excellent, humane person. He had his medical education MBBS and MD (Medicine) from KG Medical College, Lucknow. He held a double diploma in Psychological Medicine, one from England and another from Scotland. He was a fellow of India's prestigious National Academy of Medical Science. In 1991, the Royal College of Psychiatrists, London, honored him with the highest award of the Honorary Fellowship of the College, and he was the only Indian psychiatrist to be thus honored. In 1997, Dr. Wig was designated as Professor Emeritus, Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, Chandigarh.

Keywords: Dr. N N Wig, Raipur Rani Block, Dhat syndrome, Hanuman complex.

Introduction

Professor Wig was born on October 1, 1930, in Gujranwala, Pakistan. He completed his MBBS from KG Medical College, Lucknow in 1953 and MD Medicine from Lucknow University in 1957.^{1,2} In MBBS he liked physiology more than anatomy, medicine more than surgery. Towards the end of his first year at the College, he read the book "The House That Freud Built" by Joseph Jastrow. That was his first introduction to the world of Psychoanalysis. He read all the books by Freud available in the library including his massive book "Interpretation of Dreams" and "Psychopathology of Everyday Life". He finally ended up by writing a paper on a psychological topic "Problems of Personality" when he was in the 4th year of Medical College. In that paper, he discussed how various psychological influences shape our personality from childhood to adult life and how symptoms are formed when personality cannot cope with the environment. He also sent it for publication to their local College magazine "The Journal of the Clinical Society". Not only was it accepted for publication but to his surprise, it was judged the "Best Paper of Year" published by a student in the Journal and he was awarded a Gold Medal with a certificate at the annual conference.³ He pursued his interest in psychiatry by training for 4 months at the All India Institute of Mental Health (now The National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences, NIMHANS), Bengaluru.²

On his return, he joined the Medical College at Lucknow as a lecturer in Neuropsychiatry. It is here that he started the first general hospital psychiatry unit in India. For 2 years (1961–62), he was on a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship and received training at the Maudsley Hospital, Institute of Psychiatry, London and the Western Psychiatric Institute, Pittsburgh, United States. He completed a Diploma in Psychological Medicine from both England and Scotland during this period.²

Dr. Wig started the Department of Psychiatry at the Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, Chandigarh in 1963 and headed the department from 1968 to

1980. In a few years, this became one of the leading centers of psychiatry in India.¹ Its reputation was enhanced in 1976 when the WHO designated it as a "WHO Collaborating Centre for Mental Health," the first such center in Asia to be accorded this honor.¹

Dr. Wig is a leading figure in International Psychiatry. He has published over 300 scientific papers in different journals and books. A number of multicentric WHO research projects followed, the most notable among them being the "Strategies for Extending Mental Health Services to Developing Countries" and the "Determinants of Outcome of Severe Mental Disorder (DOSMed).² In October 2000, on his 70th birthday, a book 'Mental Health in India 1950 – 2000' was published in his honor in which many leading national and international mental health experts contributed.¹ *The joy of mental health* is a collection of articles and essays by Dr. Wig written during 1995-2005 in newspapers, medical journals, and books. The book is divided into three parts: Part I contains some articles from newspapers etc, Part II has articles from medical journals along with some lectures and orations, Part III is a collection of some interviews and news items related to Dr. Wig.¹

For the last ten years, he was on the Steering Committee of the World Psychiatric Association's International Programme to reduce stigma and discrimination due to mental illness.¹ It was his dream to provide free and dignified mental health services to the poor. After his retirement, he settled in Panchkula. He continued to be active in clinical service, teaching, and voluntary social service activities. He was closely associated with the work of Servants of the People Society, Lajpat Rai Bhawan, Chandigarh, where he had been conducting free mental health checkups twice a week for over 20 years and had treated over 30,000 patients with mental health problems. He also organized regular lectures and discussion groups on mental health for the general public.

Contributions of Prof. NN Wig to Psychiatry

1. Among his various research studies, Prof. Wig will be particularly remembered for his work in Community Mental Health in the villages of Raipur Rani Block in Haryana. This project eventually provided the model for the National Mental Health Programme in India and inspired similar programs in other developing countries.^{1,2}
2. He was the first psychiatrist to focus on the understanding of mental disorders in India.²
3. He led a number of multidisciplinary studies in consultation-liaison with the Departments of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Nephrology, Pediatrics, Neurology, etc.^{2,4}
4. He contributed to the classification of psychiatric disorders both in India and at the international level.
5. He made seminal contributions to research in the area of nosology, culture-bound syndromes, course, and outcome of psychoses, psychotherapy, and psychology.²
6. He introduced Dhat syndrome more than 50 years back. Dhat syndrome (Dhat meaning dhatu - metal, elixir) has been specified as a CBS (culture-bound syndrome), specific to culture of Indian subcontinent characterised by a belief of passing semen in urine leading to loss of sexual vigour and accompanied by a number of vague somatic symptoms of anxiety and depression which can be considered as a form of somatization.⁵
He did a study to investigate the cultural basis of Dhat syndrome. 107 subjects from the general public were interviewed. A vignette describing an individual having nocturnal emissions was read aloud to subjects. Attitudes towards nocturnal emissions, causes, and management were investigated. Results showed a large segment of the general public from all socioeconomic classes believed that semen loss is harmful, preservation of semen guarantees health, longevity and supernatural powers. Such belief was more commonly held in lower socioeconomic status subjects.
He concluded that the symptoms usually disappear if the misconceptions about semen loss were effectively dealt with. By increasing literacy, progress in sex knowledge the syndrome may become less common.⁶
7. He suggested empathetic listening, non-confrontational approach, education about misconceptions, support and reassurance in addition to using medications for anxiety and depression. The syndrome is described in ICD-10.⁷
8. NN Wig and Singh extracted psychiatric categories from DSM - II relevant for use in India. They also argued for a separate category of acute psychosis for brief psychotic episodes precipitated by stress which does not fit into Kreplinian dichotomy. They cited work from different countries like Asia, Germany, and Scandinavia in support of a clinically different psychosis whose presentations and outcome differed from schizophrenia and manic-depression. They also subclassified acute psychosis into confusional, paranoid, hallucinatory, schizoaffective and hysterical psychosis.⁸

9. Prof NN Wig used the story of Hanuman in helping patients with psychotherapy, teaching medical doctors and trainees in Psychiatry (Lord Hanuman lost the knowledge about his power to fly because of curse by Rishis and he regained his powers when reminded by Jambhavan during a crucial mission in search of Goddess Sita, is the subject of NN Wig's description about Hanuman complex and its resolution). He also appealed to psychotherapists and people to draw conclusions from Indian mythology.⁹

Positions Held

1. He was the honorary general secretary of the Indian Psychiatric Society from 1968 to 1973.
2. Headed the department of psychiatry, PGIMER from 1968 to 1980.
3. Head of the Department of Psychiatry at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi (1981-1983).
4. From 1984 till 1990, he was the regional advisor for mental health at the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (EMRO) of the World Health Organization (WHO) at Alexandria, Egypt.
5. He was a fellow of India's prestigious National Academy of Medical Science.
6. He was also a member of the WHO advisory panel on mental health.
7. Also a member of the Steering Committee of the World Psychiatric Association's international program to reduce stigma and discrimination due to mental illness. In this capacity, he contributed to the development of mental health programs of 22 countries.¹

Awards

1. In 1991, the Royal College of Psychiatrists, London, honored him with the highest award of the Honorary Fellowship of the College. Prof. Wig is the only psychiatrist from India to be thus honored.¹
2. In April 2003, Bombay Psychiatric Society honored him with a Life Time Achievement Award.
3. In September 2004, Fountain House, Psychiatric Centre at Lahore, Pakistan, named a newly constructed building as Prof. N.N. Wig Unit, in recognition of his services to the development of mental health in the countries of South Asia.¹

Conclusion

At a time when western psychiatric concepts and treatment were used in our country, Prof NN Wig was one among the few psychiatrists' who could develop the concept and management of Dhat syndrome and Acute Psychosis. They got included in ICD and DSM. So this way Prof.Wig contributed to the classification of mental disorders remarkably. However, above and beyond his distinguished career, what is noteworthy is the great reverence, respect, and love that he evokes in all those who know him.¹⁰ Prof. Wig will always be remembered with a lot of respect and affection for his contributions to research in the area of nosology,

culture-bound syndromes, course, and outcome of psychoses, psychotherapy, and psychology.

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