Obituary

Mahdi Hasan
(21 March 1936–12 January 2013)

A TEACHER OF TEACHERS PASSES ON
Professor Mahdi Hasan (born in Gadayan village, Akbarpur, then in Faizabad, now Ambedkar Nagar, Uttar Pradesh) was Senior Honorary Scientist of the Indian National Science Academy; Honorary Professor, King George’s Medical University, Lucknow; and formerly Principal and Chief Medical Superintendent (1983–87), Dean (1991–93) and Head of the Department of Anatomy, Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College, Aligarh.

He was an internationally renowned anatomist, a pioneering brain researcher and a reputed national expert of medical education. He had many firsts to his credit: he was the first in India to have obtained an MS with honours in anatomy; the first anatomist to be selected by the Government of India for the German Academic Exchange Fellowship (DAAD) in 1965; the only Indian anatomist to be chosen Fellow of Alexander von-Humboldt Foundation (Germany); the first Indian anatomist to be elected Fellow of the Indian National Science Academy (FNA) and to be awarded the Padma Shri.

Professor Hasan’s initial education was in Akbarpur (Faizabad). Life in Akbarpur was rather tough in those pre-Independence days as he had already lost his father when he was 4 years old and had been separated from his mother who was ill. However, this did not deter him from pursuing his life with zeal and devotion to his studies and dedication for sports. He used to study at night in the light of a kerosene lamp and play during the day in the fields of the village. He excelled in studies and was appreciated for his sporting prowess.

Professor Hasan did his Intermediate from Christian College, Lucknow and BSc I year from Lucknow University. In 1953, he was selected for MBBS at King George’s Medical College (KGMC), Lucknow. After graduation, Professor B.N. Sinha (then Head of Orthopaedics and also ex-president, Medical Council of India) persuaded him to join the Department of Orthopaedics. However, within a week of joining he went to Professor Sinha and told him that he wanted to teach and in this branch he would seldom get a chance to do so. Professor Sinha took him to his student under street light.

Then and there on the street, using a bicycle seat as support for pen and paper, he spent over two hours explaining the matter to the student. After this, the student under street light.

Professor Hasan was a person who had utmost devotion, dedication and determination in acquiring, creating and disseminating knowledge. Seldom does one find a nucleus around which an institution is build, but it goes to the credit of Professor Mahdi Hasan that at least three premier medical institutions of India and abroad—Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College, Aligarh will always remember him as its illustrious student and teacher; King George’s Medical University, Lucknow (a medical institution founded around 55 years (1958–2013), fought a relentless battle and succeeded in giving a completely new orientation to the teaching of anatomy. Thousands of his former students, practising modern medicine around the globe, not only adored him but also respected his genius. Hundreds of them are professors/consultants in various specialities of medicine and surgery in India and abroad.

His passion for teaching did not dip even after retirement. He continued to teach and do research and write for grants. He could take classes anywhere—even in corridors. Once at Aligarh Muslim University, a student asked him for time to seek some clarifications. Then and there on the street, using a bicycle seat as support for pen and paper, he spent over two hours explaining the matter to the student under street light.

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Alas! This renowned medical teacher breathed his last at 6 p.m. on 12 January 2013 after fighting a relentless battle against cancer of the prostrate. His wife, Mrs Abida Mahdi died soon after on 24 February 2013.

ABBAS ALI MAHDI*
Department of Biochemistry
King George’s Medical University
Lucknow
Uttar Pradesh
abbasalimahdi@gmail.com

* Professor Mahdi Hasan’s son