

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 friend Professor Dharam Narain (Department of Anatomy). Dr Hasan joined the anatomy department as a demonstrator in 1958. The same year he got married to Abida Kazim, who was an MA in Urdu, a rare achievement at that time for a woman from a Muslim family. In 1962, he did his MS in anatomy with honours, and after briefly working as a lecturer at KGMC, Lucknow, in 1963 he moved to Aligarh as a Reader in anatomy.

Continuing his pursuit of knowledge, he went to Germany in 1965. He not only learnt electron microscopy and worked on ageing with the renowned Professor (Dr) Paul Glees at the University of

Gottingen, but also got an opportunity to learn German. Very few people know that he was an external examiner of the German language at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi and Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh for almost 17 years. Although in 1972 he was offered the citizenship of Germany, he politely declined and came back to India and established India's first Interdisciplinary Brain Research Centre (IBRC) at Aligarh in 1980.

His persistent endeavour was to pursue basic medical research and his main thrust was to study problems of national relevance, such as environmental pollution, pesticide and metal neurotoxicity and brain ageing. His commitment and dedication to acquire and disseminate knowledge can also be judged from the fact that during the last 6 months of his life, when he was very seriously ill, he worked earnestly to complete a book on Treacher Collins Syndrome. He would sit for long hours with swollen legs kept on a stool writing the book, which he completed in December 2012, a month before his death. Fortunately, the book was published a few days before his death when he was in the intensive care unit.

Dr Hasan, all through his illustrious academic career spanning 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 specialties 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.

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 built, but it goes to the credit of Professor Mahdi Hasan that at least three premier medical institutions of North India will always fondly cherish his memory. KGMC will always remember him as its illustrious student and teacher; Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College, Aligarh will always remember him as an excellent, dedicated and devoted teacher; and Era's Lucknow Medical College, Lucknow (a medical institution founded around him) will find it difficult to overlook its founder Director-Principal and Trustee.

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 prostate. His wife, Mrs Abida Mahdi died soon after on 24 February 2013.

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