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HAKIM AJMAL KHAN (1868–1927), A Man of Determination for Renaissance of Indigenous Medicine

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Hakim Ajmal Khan (1868–1927) was a distinguished figure in India, known for his expertise in Unani medicine, his dedication to the freedom struggle, and his efforts in educational reform. Every year on February 11th, the Ministry of Ayush, Government of India, commemorates Hakim Ajmal Khan's birthday as "Unani Day," paying tribute to his legacy. This article serves as a homage to Hakim Ajmal Khan's life. It offers a glimpse into his remarkable journey, emphasizing his significant contributions to medicine, education, and the Indian independence movement.

Introduction:**Early Life:**

Born on February 11, 1868, in Delhi, India, Hakim Ajmal Khan hailed from a lineage of esteemed Unani physicians. He received his education in traditional Islamic, steeped in the rich heritage of his family's Unani medical tradition.

His ancestral roots can be traced back to the historic mansion of Delhi, known as Sharif Manzil. Originating from Herat, his noble ancestors journeyed to India alongside the great emperor Babur. During the era of Akbar, Hakim Ajmal Khan's family became closely associated with the royal court. His father, Hakim Mahmood Khan, was the grandson of Hakim Muhammad Sharif Khan, the esteemed personal physician of Mughal Emperor Shah Alam.

After memorizing the Quran, Hakim Ajmal Khan pursued further education in Arabic and Persian. Subsequently, under the tutelage of his elder brother, Hakim Muhammad Wasil Khan, he delved into the realm of Unani medicine. His expertise in the field earned him nationwide renown.

In 1892, Hakim Ajmal Khan was appointed as the physician to the Nawab of Rampur, marking the beginning of a transformative chapter in his life. During his decade-long tenure in Rampur, he deepened his understanding of Arabic language and literature under the guidance of an Arab physician named Tabib Makki. Proficient in Arabic, he engaged in fluent conversations, further enriching his scholarly pursuits.

Significant works

Hakim Ajmal Khan's life was marked by a series of significant contributions:

Founding the All-India Vedic & Tibbi Conference (1906): In a pioneering effort, Hakim Ajmal Khan established this conference, aiming to promote the Vedic and Tibbi traditions in medicine.

Declining British titles (1908): Despite being acknowledged by the British Government with prestigious titles such as Qaiser-e-Hind and Haziq-ul-Mulk, Hakim Ajmal Khan humbly declined them, preferring the title bestowed upon him by the nation: Masih-ul-Mulk (Healer of India) and "a king without a crown."

Appointment as chief administrator of Jamia Millia Islamia (1920): Hakim Ajmal Khan's leadership extended to education as he assumed the role of chief administrator at Jamia Millia Islamia, furthering its mission of educational empowerment.

Leading the Civil Disobedience Movement (1920): Under his guidance, the Civil Disobedience Movement gained momentum, garnering approval from the Congress Working Committee and challenging the British government's authority.

Presiding over the Khilafat Conference (1921): Hakim Ajmal Khan's leadership was evident as he presided over the Khilafat Conference, advocating for the rights of Muslims and supporting the Khilafat Movement.

Championing Hindu-Muslim unity: Throughout his life, Hakim Ajmal Khan remained a staunch advocate for Hindu-Muslim unity, fostering harmony and cooperation between the communities.

Influence in national politics: Hakim Ajmal Khan's opinions held significant sway in national politics, reflecting his esteemed status and influence among political circles.

Literary and medical services

Hakim Ajmal Khan's contributions to traditional Indian medicine were profound and enduring:

Establishing Ayurvedic & Tibbi College in Delhi (1912): Reflecting his commitment to education and traditional medicine, Hakim Ajmal Khan's visionary initiative led to the founding of this esteemed institution, dedicated to preserving and advancing the principles of Ayurveda and Unani medicine.

Revival and promotion of traditional Indian medicine systems: Recognizing the value of India's ancient healing traditions, Hakim Ajmal Khan played a pivotal role in revitalizing and advocating for the widespread adoption of Ayurveda and Unani medicine across the nation.

Expertise in Unani remedies: Renowned for his deep understanding of herbal remedies, Hakim Ajmal Khan was celebrated for his proficiency in treating various

ailments using natural and herbal-based therapies. His knowledge and expertise contributed significantly to the advancement of traditional Indian medicine practices.

Compositions:

Apart from his political writings, Hakim Ajmal Khan authored several books on medicine. In Arabic, his publications include:

1. "Al-Qawl al-Marghoob Fi al-Ma'al-Mashroob" (Desirable Sayings Concerning Drinking Water)
2. "Al-Tuhfat al-Hamidiyah Fi al-Sina'at al-Takhlisiyah" (Hamidian Gift in the Art of Distillation)
3. "Al-Bayan al-Hasan Bi Sharh al-Ma'jun al-Musamma Bi Al-Kaseer al-Badan" (The Good Explanation of the Compound Named "The Exilir of the Body")
4. "Al-Masail al-Khamsah" (The Five Questions)
5. "Muqaddamah al-Lughat al-Tibbiyah" (Introduction to Medical Languages)
6. "Awraq Muzhirah Musfirah" (Fruitful Travelling Papers)
7. "Al-Sa'atia al-Wajeezah" (The Concise Hours)

In Urdu, his works include the pamphlets "Ta'oon", "Haziq", and "Ifadat Masih-ul-Mulk". The medical experiences and treatments mentioned in "Ifadat" were written by Hakim Nazir Ahmad Khan.

Research

Hakim Ajmal Khan's pioneering efforts in indigenous medicine research set him apart as one of the foremost physicians in India. His dedication to reviving and promoting both Ayurvedic and Unani medicine was unparalleled. The drug "Ajmaline" was named in honor of his extensive research contributions.

Maulana Shibli Nomani, a respected figure, lauded Hakim Ajmal Khan, stating, "In my opinion, there is no one more honorable than Hakim Ajmal Khan throughout India, because it is difficult to find anyone better versed in both knowledge and leadership."

Following the passing of Hakim Abdul Majid Khan, Hakim Ajmal Khan took on the responsibility of overseeing the Madrasa Tibbiya, demonstrating his unwavering commitment to the advancement of Unani medicine education.

In 1904, he founded the Unani and Vedic Medicine Company, later expanding its scope to establish the Hindustani Dawakhana. The construction of the Dawakhana building in 1910 marked a significant milestone, as it quickly became the primary source of income for the college following its expansion.

Hakim Ajmal Khan's clinic in Delhi was renowned and always bustling with patients seeking his expertise and holistic approach to healthcare. His enduring legacy in the field of indigenous medicine continues to inspire and guide practitioners to this day.

Social services:

Hakim Ajmal Khan's active involvement in various educational and administrative roles underscored his commitment to advancing educational initiatives:

From 1910 to 1925, Hakim Ajmal Khan served as a dedicated member of the administrative committee of Nadwatul Ulama, Lucknow, contributing his expertise for fifteen consecutive years. Initially drawn to the Aligarh Movement, Hakim Ajmal Khan wholeheartedly supported Sir Syed's educational endeavors, becoming a trustee of Aligarh College in 1900. In 1911, he had the honor of attending the coronation of Emperor George V as the representative of the Nawab of Rampur, receiving royal recognition for his contributions.

During his travels to Cambridge, Oxford, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Constantinople, Cairo, and other historical sites, Hakim Ajmal Khan meticulously studied prestigious hospitals and landmarks, enriching his knowledge and insights.

Leveraging his experiences and observations from these travels, he implemented significant reforms in the Hindustani Dawakhana and Madrasa Tibbiya, demonstrating his commitment to progress and innovation.

On March 29, 1916, the foundation stone of the Ayurvedic and Tibbiya College in Qarol Bagh was laid by Lord Hardinge, marking a milestone in the advancement of traditional medicine education.

Five years later, in 1921, Hakim Ajmal Khan invited Gandhi Ji to inaugurate the college's extensive and magnificent building, showcasing his dedication to educational excellence through a grand inauguration ceremony.

Jamia Millia Islamia

During the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1920, a significant number of students from Aligarh Muslim University responded to the appeals of leaders like Hakim Ajmal Khan, Ali Brothers, and others, leading to a mass exodus from the university. This prompted the urgent need to establish a new educational institution aligned with the aspirations of the movement.

In November 1920, in a momentous ceremony held at the grand mosque of Aligarh Muslim University in the presence of Maulana Mahmood-ul-Hasan, the establishment of Jamia Millia Islamia was announced. Hakim Ajmal Khan was appointed as the Chancellor of the university, signifying his prominent role in its inception and leadership.

Subsequently, Jamia Millia Islamia was relocated to Delhi, where Hakim Ajmal Khan continued to serve as its Chancellor. Following this transition, he severed ties with Aligarh Muslim University and refrained from participating in its gatherings.

However, in 1927, during the establishment of Tibbiya College at Aligarh Muslim University, Hakim Ajmal Khan attended a meeting of its administrative committee, demonstrating his ongoing commitment to advancing educational initiatives within the broader framework of Unani Medicine.

Political Activism:

Hakim Ajmal Khan was deeply involved in national political affairs from an early age. He began by writing articles for his family's weekly newspaper, "Akmal-ul-Akhbar," and gradually became more engaged in politics. Notably, he led the Muslim delegation that met with Viceroy Lord Minto in Simla in 1906, showcasing his early leadership role.

In Delhi, Hakim Ajmal Khan earned the trust and respect of both Hindus and Muslims to a remarkable degree, a feat unmatched by any other Muslim leader of his time. This trust was evident in his election as the president of the reception council of the Delhi Hindu Mahasabha in 1921, a testament to his ability to bridge communal divides.

Furthermore, Hakim Ajmal Khan actively participated in significant political gatherings, such as the historic session of the Muslim League in Mumbai in 1915 and the meetings of the Muslim League and the Congress in Lucknow in 1916. During these sessions, under the guidance of leaders from both parties, a comprehensive action plan was devised, fostering a sense of unity between Hindus and Muslims that endured for a substantial period.

The Khilafat Movement, spearheaded by Maulana Muhammad Ali, gained momentum across the country, leading to the imprisonment of prominent Muslim leaders including Muhammad Ali, Shaukat Ali, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Zafar Ali Khan, and Maulana Mahmood-ul-Hasan. Despite these challenges, Hakim Ajmal Khan remained actively engaged on platforms of both the Congress and the League. Throughout his political career, Hakim Ajmal Khan's dedication to national unity and his tireless efforts to foster harmony between communities stood as a testament to his enduring legacy in Indian politics.

During the second decade of the 20th century, Hakim Ajmal Khan emerged as a prominent figure in Indian politics, commanding attention and respect in various political gatherings, assemblies, conferences, and meetings. It was during this period that Hakim Ajmal Khan and Gandhi Ji established their initial rapport. In a significant milestone, Hakim Ajmal Khan was elected as the President of the Indian National Congress at the Ahmedabad session in 1921, marking him as the fifth Muslim leader to hold this prestigious position. Prior to him, esteemed Muslim leaders such as Sir Badruddin Tyabji, Rahmatullah Sayani, Nawab Syed Mohammad Bahadur, and Syed Hasan Imam had also served as Presidents of the Congress. This achievement was a momentous honor for both the nation and its people, underscoring Hakim Ajmal Khan's remarkable stature and influence during that era.

Characterized by a unique persona, Hakim Ajmal Khan transcended the confines of any specific role or organization due to his unwavering activism and fervor. His name reverberated not only within the national sphere but also across international movements. Hakim Ajmal Khan's influence extended across various platforms including the Indian National Congress, Muslim League, All India Khilafat Committee, and All India Unani and Ayurvedic Conference, further amplifying his stature. Indeed, at times, it appeared as though he wielded the most significant influence in shaping the course of national politics.

Distinguished characteristics

Hakim Ajmal Khan possessed at least 4 remarkable qualities that set him apart from his contemporaries:

1. Versatility and Leadership

Hakim Ajmal Khan's association with eminent national leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Maulana Shaukat Ali, Maulana Muhammad Ali Jauhar, Abul Kalam Azad, and Dr. Mukhtar Ansari during the Khilafat Movement highlighted his versatility. His multifaceted talents as a physician, scholar of Arabic language, poet, and frontline fighter for India's independence distinguished him as a versatile personality. His eloquent and humorous poetry showcased his literary prowess, while his medical expertise and healing skills underscored his commitment to holistic well-being. He seamlessly balanced his roles as a renowned physician and healer with his scholarly pursuits in the Arabic language, poetry, and literature. His verses were characterized by eloquence, depth, and a touch of humor, reflecting his poetic prowess and literary acumen. He skillfully selected words to enhance the sweetness, impact, and musicality of his expression, leaving a lasting impression on his audience.

2. Unprecedented Presidency of 4 Major National Organizations:

Hakim Ajmal Khan's historic presidency of three major national organizations—the Indian National Congress, the All-India Muslim League, and the All-India Khilafat Committee—illustrates his immense popularity and influence across diverse circles. This unique feat highlights his ability to garner support and foster collaboration among various factions.

3. Pioneering Efforts in advocating Ayurvedic and Unani Medicine:

Hakim Ajmal Khan's visionary initiative to establish a common platform for collaboration between Ayurvedic physicians and Unani Hakims through the All India Ayurvedic and Unani Tibbi Conference in 1906 was groundbreaking. His efforts aimed to unite the country's physicians to preserve and promote indigenous medical practices, significantly contributing to the preservation of Ayurveda and Unani medicine traditions.

4. Initiation of Research in Unani Medicine:

Hakim Ajmal Khan's pioneering role in initiating a research program in Unani medicine marked a significant departure from the non-research-oriented

approach prevalent at the time. By establishing a medical research committee and conducting research on the famous drug Asrol (*Rauvolfia serpentina*), he laid the foundation for modern research in Unani medicine. His collaboration with renowned chemist Dr. Saleem-ul-Zaman Siddiqui led to the discovery of active ingredients such as Ajmaline, Ajmalinine, and Ajmalicine, which proved effective for the circulatory system.

The family greatness and dignity of Hakeem Ajmal Khan, personal virtues and perfections, medical competence and proficiency, passion for national and international issues, leadership role in the freedom movement, among all these, his most significant achievement was his selfless dedication to preserving and reviving indigenous medicine, particularly Unani medicine, amidst challenging circumstances. Despite facing threats from the British government, which sought to impose restrictions on indigenous medicines in India, Hakim Ajmal Khan emerged as a stalwart defender of Unani medicine's scientific validity and relevance.

In response to the looming threat against indigenous medicines, Hakim Ajmal Khan took decisive action by establishing the All India Ayurvedic and Unani Medical Conference in 1906. This groundbreaking initiative brought together Hakeems and Vaidyas from across the country, uniting them in a common cause to safeguard and promote indigenous medical traditions. By fostering collaboration and solidarity among practitioners, Hakim Ajmal Khan effectively thwarted conspiracies aimed at undermining the legitimacy of Unani medicine.

Through his unwavering advocacy and leadership, Hakim Ajmal Khan ensured the survival and preservation of Unani medicine, thereby securing its continued relevance and vitality in India. His efforts not only safeguarded an integral aspect of the nation's cultural heritage but also laid the foundation for the enduring legacy of indigenous medicine in the country.

Indeed, Hakim Ajmal Khan's relentless efforts and unwavering determination played a pivotal role in the preservation and recognition of Unani medicine in India. Today, India stands as the sole country in the world where Unani medicine is officially recognized by the government, and practitioners of Unani medicine receive numerous facilities and support from the Indian government.

Hakim Ajmal Khan's steadfast advocacy ensured that Unani medicine thrived in India, despite facing challenges and skepticism elsewhere. In countries like Central Asia and the Middle East, where Unani medicine once flourished, colonialism and Western politics led to its decline and marginalization. However, in India, Hakim Ajmal Khan's determined leadership prevented such a fate for Unani medicine.

His unwavering resolve to uphold indigenous medical traditions, coupled with his ability to articulate the value of Unani medicine to the British government, ensured its survival and recognition in India. Hakim Ajmal Khan's legacy as a determined reviver of medicine continues to be felt, as his efforts have secured the enduring presence and recognition of Unani medicine in the country.

Padma Shri Hakim Syed Zillur Rahman, in his profound appreciation, aptly acknowledges the invaluable contributions of Hakim Ajmal Khan to the preservation and advancement of indigenous medicine in India. Without Hakim Ajmal Khan's extraordinary efforts and the platform provided by his medical conference, indigenous medicines in the country would have faced extinction, echoing the sentiments shared by scholars and experts in the field of Indian medicine.

Hakim Ajmal Khan's legacy continues to be upheld by dedicated scholars and practitioners of Indian medicine, who carry forward his vision with humility and determination. The celebration of Hakim Ajmal Khan's birthday as Unani Day by the Ministry of Ayush, Government of India, stands as a fitting tribute to his exemplary service and enduring impact on the medical landscape of the country.

The far-reaching effects of Hakim Ajmal Khan's tireless work are evident in India's recognition and embrace of various alternative healing methods, making it the only country in the world to officially endorse such practices alongside allopathic medicine. Despite the advancements in modern medicine, India's diverse population continues to rely on traditional systems such as Ayurveda, Yoga, Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy, a testament to the lasting influence of Hakim Ajmal Khan's legacy.

Although Hakim Ajmal Khan's life was cut short at the age of 59, he dedicated approximately 40 years of his life to the service of the nation, leaving an indelible

mark on the medical history of India. May his righteous deeds be rewarded with boundless blessings from Allah, as his contributions continue to inspire and benefit generations to come.

Legacy:

These remarkable endeavors cemented Hakim Ajmal Khan's legacy as a visionary leader, dedicated healer, and unwavering advocate for social justice and unity. Through his establishment of educational institutions, advocacy for traditional medicine systems, and expertise in herbal remedies, Hakim Ajmal Khan left an indelible mark on the field of Indian medicine, enriching the health and well-being of countless individuals.

Conclusion:

In addition to his remarkable contributions to medicine and education, Hakim Ajmal Khan's fiery passion, deep spirituality, linguistic proficiency, and poetic sensibility further exemplified his unique persona and enduring legacy. Hakim Ajmal Khan's life epitomizes the ideals of dedication, service, and leadership. His legacy as a healer, educator, and freedom fighter continues to be celebrated and honored, inspiring individuals across generations to strive for excellence and contribute positively to society. His pioneering efforts in medicine, education, and the struggle for independence have left an indelible mark on the fabric of Indian history, making him a revered figure whose legacy will be cherished for years to come.

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