

## ***Tribute***

### **Prof. Dr Abul Khayr Kashfi**

Who is this stepping softly but firmly amid the overwhelming darkness? Head bowed but eyes alert, treading a long-familiar path? It is not even dawn yet but the determined traveller heads effortlessly towards his goal. It is a road that he travels five times a day – to a little makeshift mosque between ‘the desert and the sown’. In the daylight, the figure would be familiar to Campus residents as Prof. Dr. Abul Khayr Kashfi because only a few would have the will and strength to wake up for the pre-dawn prayers.

It was an honour for me to offer my poor motorbike to take him to the mosque a few times a day whenever it was possible to do so- knowing as I did his great attachment to the mosque and to offering prayers with the *jamaat*. While returning, I often made the same offer but Dr. Kashfi was too much of a gentleman to accept it when Maulana Abdur Rashid Nomani, was present. It was amusing to see the two *buzurgs* each preferring the other over himself for the return ride. The same Maulana Nomani used to give a *dars-e-Hadith* once a week (perhaps on Thursday) at the house of Dr. Kashfi, which was a most useful and profitable activity on an intellectually- starved campus. This used to be followed by tea and ice-cream and casual exchange of news and views. It was in the same room-where the *dars* was held- that the Holy Prophet, as Dr. Kashfi told me, made his appearance to him in the flesh. A table used to be kept over the spot so that no one could step on it.

There is no doubt that Dr. Kashfi’s strong attachment to the Holy Prophet is the reason for his several privileged visions that he has been favoured with of the Greatest Teacher himself. This also the reason (as I understand it) for his several visits to the Haramayn where he has paid his respects at the various holy sites. With the passage of time, Dr. Kashfi is being coloured with ‘the colour of Allah’ as stated in the Quran and ‘whose colour is better than that of Allah?’ Those who have observed this progressive increase notice that his own individual ‘colour’ has been subsumed by ‘the colour of Allah’. [Quran 2.138]

While Dr. Kashfi’s head is in the clouds, his feet are firmly on the ground. He knows that the world is an imperfect place where sorrows exist, where there is pain and suffering. So much of his efforts on the

earthly plane are devoted to the removal of suffering. At my request, Dr. Kashfi visited the ailing Allama Shams Brelvi – a great scholar and translator from Persian. It was a unique experience for me to see the kind courtesies exchanged between the two *buzurgs* – a way of life that is dying out. Allama Shams [d. 1999] was a capable poet who could compose verses extempore. His verses on this occasion were:

*Saath mein hain Janab-e-Kashfi  
Tasveer kamal-e-ilm-o-fun ki  
Ihsan hai Munir Wasti ka  
Hai wasta ilm dosti ka....*

These verses have crystallized the occasion in my memory.

It is the greatness of a person to acknowledge himself to be the pupil of a teacher no longer alive. An example of this is when Dr Kashfi told me that my late father, Prof. S.M. Jamil Wasti [d.1981] had been his teacher at college. I could not have known this myself. But Kashfi Sahib's reiteration of this respect for his late teacher only raises him high in the scale of civilized values.

Once, when I was resident on campus, I had the misfortune of having a nasty moulvi as my neighbour. This person tried to cause me every kind of trouble. Dr. Kashfi tried to help me as much as he could though I was told by some persons that he had a soft corner for moulvis. But his stand was principled – as I knew it would be. The problem eventually resolved itself with the sudden departure of my unkind neighbour.

Now as Dr. Kashfi grows old gracefully – a child with children, a youth with youths and an adult among adults – he is surrounded with the love of his extended family, his old friends, his pupils and his admirers. His mature wisdom must necessarily be transmitted to another generation who is totally unaware of the sacrifices of their elders and betters who worked so hard to make this world a better place for them.

Finally, I feel that these lines from *Julius Caesar* well apply to Dr. Kashfi:

His life was gentle, and the elements  
So mixed in him, that Nature might stand up  
And say to all the world, "This was a man!"  
Act 5, scene v, ll. 73-75.

[This essay was originally written for an anthology of tributes given on his birthday. Sadly, Dr Kashfi passed away soon after this event.].