

Baitoth : A Tribute to Jagan Nath Durani

He was calm like Jheel-a-Dal, alert like a fish, poised to face the world. But more than that he rarely deflected from his poise and purpose in life. Who was this unheroic looking hero amidst us whose control over his mind was a given, like the sunsets following sunrises, ad infinitum?

The passing away of Baitoth yesterday, at Jammu, was a shock to me. Though his being at age 95 and in the most debilitating state of health should have prepared me for the eventuality. But for the loss of a gem amidst us one is never prepared to prepare for.

Baitoth (we at Kauls called him Baitoth, but his family called him Baiji) was born, most likely, in Kashmir, and he had his school education there. His father, Radha Krishen Durani, was my paternal grandfather, Sudharshan Kaul's, brother-in-law. Because of the closeness of his relationship with us, he spent some seven years living with us at Malikyar, Srinagar. This in itself is a proof of his discipline and accommodativeness.

Later, after obtaining B.A. in physics from Kashmir, he went to Lahore for masters in physics. He was educated there in D.A.V. College. He also studied at Banaras Hindu University for a special course.

Throughout his student life he remained a very good student; I believe, almost always obtaining a first class. You could see, later in his life, how he thought. He used his raw intelligence to ask simple questions about the subject at hand. Simple answers to the questions, whether obtained from others, or worked out by himself, formed his mind on the subject. He seemed to give facts an important consideration before using his intuition.

He taught simply, as it was a projection of himself to the world. He was without rancorousness of his colleagues and without the fanfare they clamored for. He well knew intrigues in his professional world but he would leave them at the college door when he calmly bicycled to his home at Rainawari to relax with his family. He never taught me in college but one winter he coached me in physics at F.Sc. level at his home. He would use the deriving method to impress knowledge in a student. That is, he would start the principles of the topic at hand, and analytically derive its higher states of knowledge. This way the topic looked so easy to understand. But reworking the experience at home later, I would lose his sure grip and simplicity of explanation, and feel the disappearance of his magical touch. It is at his home I first saw a picture of Albert Einstein, little knowing how important a part of my mind he would become later.

There were many sharp professors in J & K those days, but Professor Durani was more than sharp, he was a gentleman par excellence. His manner of speaking, his body language, his mischievous smile, his laughter at jokes, all made one feel that they were in presence of a special person.

His innate sense of balance, fairness, and gracefulness made him naturally a wise and a compassionate man. But he did not want to take chances with this unreliable world, so he honed skills to deal with it. He could be tough as nails if the worldly situation demanded so. Some saw this as his cold-calculatedness, but it was a weapon he used when everything else failed to change the world to become fair. At his home also he sometimes used the stance of detached relationships to tackle family quarrels, which were aplenty, as was the wont of KP culture those days.

He went through a lot in life, as human beings must, especially the thinking ones. Living till very old age is not a matter of genes only. It takes good genes with a good mind to live up to 95. Baitoth had a stretchable mind. His simple faith in the dignity of a human being was, perhaps, his best strength. But he had more than

that, I guess, a faith in God also.

For generations to come, Kashmiris who knew him or knew of him, will tip their hats in their minds to salute this man of wisdom and compassion, Professor J.N. Durani.

Now all his troubles are behind Baitoth, especially the loss of his beloved wife, Ammaji, a couple of years ago. Now he has migrated to the land of eternity, where angels dare to dance.

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