



Major General (R) Ashur Khan
MBBS, FCPS

Seasons and Cycles of Life

An Honest, True reflection on personal,
Professional life of a Bangash Pathan

This book under review, “Seasons and Cycles of Life” by Maj. Gen. (Retd) Ashur Khan is a true and honest reflection of his personal, family and professional life. It gives details of the hostile surrounding in which he had to survive, breaking the shackles of poverty and ignorance and rose to the rank of Major General Deputy Commandant of Armed Forces Institute of Cardiology/National Institute of Heart Diseases due to his hard work, honesty, sincerity, earned a great name fame in the medical profession in Pakistan.

Major General Ashur Khan is a very dear friend whom I have known now for many years but after reading this book, I came to know much more about him. In fact while I was reading this book, I thought it was my own story and story of hundreds and thousands of young boys who are born in poor families wherein the concept of education has no importance at all. Being member of a large family, they are always suffering from lack of resources, most often living hand to mouth, hence they are deprived of the luxury of getting education, good healthy food and cannot plan their career. Just a few of them are lucky enough who come across some helping hands, well-wishers who come to their rescue, arrange for their education and help them show the right path. Those who are fortunate enough among those, are brave, hardworking, and sincere and work with devotion and dedication eventually do progress and prosper. But during the process they are required to sacrifice a lot, show patience, understanding, tolerance and eventually a

day comes when the luck smiles on them. Dr. Ashur Khan was certainly one of those lucky ones.

Writing in a brief note on the book, his friend and colleague Maj.Gen. **Mohammad Ashraf Khan** currently Chief Executive of Hearts International Hospital Rawalpindi, says that he was “pleasantly surprised to observe the mannerism, politeness, compassionate interpersonal relations with his colleagues from a Bangash Pathan brought up in the lap of rugged barren mountains, narrow unkind valleys and hostile surroundings”. Ashur Khan, he further writes, “is a man of character, tolerance, patience, understanding and selflessness and sacrifice which he showed during his detention as prisoner of war in Indian POW camps. His story is very inspiring”.

S. Munawar Ali Shah Banuri in his preface to the book also pays him tributes stating that “Surprisingly his modesty has not parted company with him despite his enviable position as a cardiologist and a retired Major General. His narrative also gives a glimpse of the conditions prevalent in East Pakistan now Bangladesh, the disastrous surrender at Dacca, the biggest in Islamic history”. There is a lot for the readers to find out in between the lines, he concludes.

Lt.Gen.Mahmud Ahmad Akhtar, former Surgeon General Pakistan Army says that “this autobiography is well written and it is a joy to read, very absorbing showing determination and commitment of the author, His honesty and hard work is rewarded by blessings of Almighty”.

Paying him rich tributes, Maj.Gen. **(Retd) Masud Ur Rehman Kiani**, former Commandant of AFIC/NIHD states that this “Knowledge seeking modern day Farhad is his decade’s old colleague and friend. He has narrated his story of struggle in a beautifully written book which is absorbing and a pleasure to read”.

Dr. Ashur Khan has dedicated this book to his teacher and mentor late **Syed Azmat Ali Shah** who is also father of **Prof. Karamat Ali Shah** another distinguished cardiologist. It was the vision and wisdom of Syed Azmat Ali Shah which guided him and

persuaded him to continue his education. He also remembers is school teacher late **Malik Anwar Khan** who showed him the way from village to the city.

Dr. Ashur Khan hails from village Surgul near Kohat and was born in the year 1943. Surgul is surrounded by barren mountains from three sides. Since seasonal rainfall is very low, it results in negligible agricultural produce. People are mostly poor but Dr. Ashur Khan says that since they have simple diet and do lot of physical activity, nobody was overweight or obese with the result that the diseases like high blood pressure, ischemic heart disease, were unknown in those days. The villages used to be self-sufficient in community service. Community workers used to be hard core professionals who inherited their profession from their forefathers. There used to be no fixed charges for service and they will accept whatever was paid. He makes an interesting point that “though the people were generally poor but they did not seem to be unhappy” which confirms that happiness is something which one cannot buy with money and affluence.

He had his primary education in the village school. Poverty was so prevalent that most of the children in junior classes, Dr. Ashur Khan recalls, had no shoes to wear. He had no means to get admission to high school but his teacher Malik Anwar Khan came to his rescue who got him admitted to Government High School No.2 in Kohat city which proved to be the turning point in his life. He spent a few months in his teacher’s house before his father bought him a bicycle so that he can come to school from the village. He passed with distinction in 1958-59 earning 746 marks and his name appears on the School’s Board of Honours in Kohat. Discipline in the school he says used to be exemplary. His father met his worthy Headmaster Syed Azmat Ali Shah who persuaded him that Ashur Khan continue his studies. He then advised Dr. Ashur Khan in the presence of his son **Karamat Ali Shah** to concentrate and continue his studies. He also recalls that academic environment and the administration at the college fell short of his expectation. “The science teacher in his first address in the class called the pre-medical group as

the future butchers and the pre-engineering students as the thieves.” In the FSc examination Dr. Ashur Khan secured the first positron in the province.

All Pakistan Urdu Mushaira

An All Pakistan Urdu Mushaira was organized by the newly elected college union where many nationally acclaimed poets including Habib Jalib narrated their Kalam. **Shaukat Thanvi** read his politically motivated poem **“Yaaro Mujhey Salam Karo, Mein Wazir Hoon”** and got tremendous applause. **Habib Jalib** read his famous poem **“Mein naheen manta, mein naheen janta”** which was followed by his revolutionary address. He also remembers **Pir Masood Shah**, an eminent practicing lawyer who helped Dr. Ashur Khan and never disappointed him whenever he was approached.

Life at Khyber Medical College

He joined Khyber Medical College in 1963 when Major General Mohammad Akram was the Principal who cancelled the admission of two students whose domicile certificates were found to be dubious. Their walk out in Anatomy paper in the First Professional MBBS in annual examination proved disaster and the whole class had to appear in the supplementary examination. The college had very experienced faculty i.e. Prof. Faruqui in pathology, Prof. Nasirudidn Azam Khan, Prof. S.A.R.Gardezi and Prof. Feroze Shah in surgery, Prof. Alvi in biochemistry, Prof. Sirajuddin Ahmad in medicine and others. He also recalls the countrywide strike when he was in first year the main slogan was Doctors Demand Dignity (3D’s). For training in obstetrics and Gynaecology they had to visit Karachi. During the student life, all the students used to get annual titles by their student colleagues which were funny and some of them stick to them in their later life as well. Dr. Ashur Khan is not at all ashamed to admit that in those days, as a student coming from a village he used to wear un-pressed clothes and unpolished old shoes but despite all this, everybody was friendly towards him. It was being honest, hard work and our determination and

commitment to strive to achieve the desired goals in difficult conditions which count and it did help us, he says. My mentor Syed Azmat Ali Shah, Dr. Ashur Khan recalls used to carry a stick concealed under his sleeve and he still imagine him standing at the school gate.

Commission in Army

Dr. Ashur Khan got commission in Army in October 1968. His first posting was at CMH Risalpur. Had posting to field medical unit at Sialkot Cantonment for two years. The next posting was an RMO to Road Construction Battalion in Kohistan Karakoram Highway. Even in those days the road from Shangla Hills from where former State of Swat started was a masterpiece throughout the Swat territory which was a great contribution by the former Wali of Swat.

Service in East Pakistan

He was ordered to go to East Pakistan during the crisis and he landed there on 29th March 1971. The chapters in the autobiography which relates to atrocities by Bengalis and all that followed is extremely painful. He recalls that “having seen these brutalities the soldiers and even the young officers of Pakistan Army had a negative opinion about the Bengalis and a feeling of vengeance developed among them”. Hence “at some places a few army persons broke into the shops abandoned by the Bengalis in the bazars and took away the stuff whatever they could find. A senior field officer was involved in looting a Bank and taking away a large amount of currency. The case was reported and he was sent back to West Pakistan to be court-martialed.” He also writes that the new CO posted to their unit was a very religious and well-read person. He would regularly lecture on motivation of troops and religion. When he came to know about the odd activities by some soldiers like breaking the shops and stealing the stuff, he told everybody that they should deposit the stolen material by passing through a big room one by one entering from one door and leaving from the

other and put down all stolen things they had like money and jewelry. The exercise was earnestly carried out and the looted stuff collected through this procedure was handed over to the Brigade Headquarter”.

Death narrowly escaped him on more than two occasions and he saw death from very close quarters during the casualty clearance operations. By early December Dr. Ashur Khan writes, ” Indian Troops guided by Mukti Bahanis had entered several sectors of East Pakistan. Most of the Pakistan Army units had lost contacts with higher headquarters and were fighting as independent units in different sectors with whatever arms and ammunition was left with them. Things got from bad to worse and one cannot win a war without the support of local civilian population who had turned hostile to us.” It was in September 1971 that Gen. A. A. K.Niazi the overall Commander of East Pakistan delivered a moral boosting address but then we witnessed the darkest day of history of Pakistan when the Pakistan Army was ordered to surrender on 16th December 1971. Everybody was stunned to hear this news.” Except a small percentage of people belonging to Jamat-e-Islami, people at large were prone to Awami League propaganda. They had no love for and neither felt any loyalty to Pakistan.” On the other hand “our national leadership in West Pakistan lacked vision, ability and interest to circumvent favorable result. “The events that followed after we lost East Pakistan were equally traumatic. There was no meaningful enquiry, even if there was one it was not brought to the light. There was no accountability. The culprits and criminals responsible for the debacle were not identified and they went scot-free.” This in fact is the real tragedy. We as a Nation has not learnt any lesson from our past mistakes and keep on repeating the same mistakes again and again that is why find ourselves at the crossroad, not knowing which way to go even today. It is time that we must learn to respect the people’s mandate. History, Dr. Ashur Khan Writes, will never forgive us for this state of indifference and insensitivity as nobody gave it a thought as to how and where things had gone wrong. They just closed the chapter of losing one half of the country forever. The

miserable conditions in the POW camps have been described in greater detail.

Life in POW Camps in India: News from Pakistan was also not good. As many POWs had not received any letter from their families. A lot of social problems arose, engagements were called off, and marriages were annulled. Some POWs lost their parents and other family members or close relatives and all this affected the morale of POWs very badly. Heated discussions and complaints against each other would suddenly erupt on petty issues like somebody having an extra cup of tea, or somebody being favoured by the cook in some way. The discipline of the soldiers working in officers barracks was also affected.”

Return to Pakistan: Dr. Ashur Khan returned from POW camps in India in the first week of April 1974, went on two months repatriation leave and was later posted to the Military Hospital Rawalpindi so that he could get on with his professional advancement. He resumed his specialty training in Grading in Medicine. **Brig. I. D. Hassan** was DG Medicine. He was very punctual and his trainees used to report at 7.15 a.m. and wait outside his office while he came exact at 7.30 a.m. New admissions in the ward used to be discussed in the morning sessions. Discipline, punctuality, dress and academic standards were all superb from which, Dr. Ashur Khan recalls we benefitted tremendously though his sarcastic remarks were considered inappropriate as it created inferiority complex among us. On successful completion Dr. Ashur Khan got designation of graded specialist. The teachers included Col. Mahmud Ahmed Akhtar, Lt.Col.Badruddin and Maj Zulfiqar Ali Khan. Col.Akhtar (later Lt.Gen.Mahmud Ahmed Akhtar) unit was most active in both undergraduate as well postgraduate academic activities. Medical Journal Club meetings were held regularly and a large number of trainees owe their FCPS to Lt.Gen.Mahmud Ahmad Akhtar as he would even sacrifice his private practice because of his academic commitments to his students. Lt. Col. Badruddin was another excellent bedside clinician, a man of principles who would call a spade a spade and won't succumb to pressure from any quarter while making his decisions.

Deputation to Saudi Arabia: He spent three years on deputation to Saudi Arabia as a Graded Medical Specialist. During his stay in Saudi Arabia he also recalls the people being beaten by sticks asking them to go for Prayer by *Mutawwas* but he feels and rightly so that nobody should be ridiculed, harsh behaviour may have an opposite effect. As a reaction, many people stopped going to mosque as they got disheartened. He sponsored the visit of his parents to perform Umra and Hajj but his father, Dr. Ashur Khan recalls, was a bit upset and decided to return to Pakistan before performing Hajj. In the meantime Dr. Ashur Khan during his vacation from Saudi Arabia to Pakistan after one year, appeared and passed FCPS-I. When Dr. Ashur Khan told this to Col. Badruddin, he was pleased and appreciated his hard work. His request to DG Medicine for posting at Military Hospital Rawalpindi on completion of his secondment was accepted so that he can prepare for FCPS Part-II examination. He also recalls the advice of Dr. Mahmud Ahmad Akhtar and help from later Major General Iftikhar Malik while serving at Army Medical College. He passed FCPS Part-II, got scholarship for PhD programme in Pharmacology and Therapeutics but on Dr. Mahmud Ahmad Akhtar's advice declined it, the Principal AMC felt unhappy with his decision. Dr. Ashur Khan then contacted Col. Zulfiqar Ali Khan Commandant of AFIC and joined there. He has also recorded the untiring efforts of Maj. Gen. Zulfiqar Ali Khan to establish and develop AFIC using his contacts with President Ziaul Haque, who extended exceptional help but did not live to formally inaugurate this institution.

Training in UK: He was sent to UK for on job training and had valuable experience in non-invasive and invasive cardiology at St. Thomas Hospital London. Writing about the working environment in London Hospitals, Dr. Ashur Khan says that "No entertainment, no long breaks in the office hours and no unnecessary talks or discussions were held during the hospital timings."

Major General Yusuf succeeded Gen. Zaufiqar's Ali Khan as Commandant of AFIC. Next commandant was Maj.Gen. Mohammad Ashraf Khan. Major Gen. Kiani assumed the command

of AFIC after the retirement of Gen. Ashraf Khan. Writing about the pioneer cardiologists, he has discussed in detail the qualities and personal characteristics of numerous of his colleagues which includes Masud Ul Hassan Nuri, Waqar Ahmad, Dr. Shakil Qureshi, Khalid Raja, Ashiq Hussain, Azhar Mehmood Kiyani, Imran Majeed, Sohail Aziz and has documented their contributions to the development of AFIC and improvement of cardiac care besides details of various dignitaries which he had a chance to treat while serving at AFIC.

Death of Gen. Asif Nawaz: What a co-incidence that Dr. Ashur Khan and Dr. Musudur Rehman Kiani were together in East Pakistan, then as POW in India and later again worked together at AFIC as Deputy Commandant and Commandant respectively. Dr. Ashur Khan has also given a detailed account of the death of the then Chief of Army Staff Gen. Asif Nawaz Janjua who was brought to AFIC on Sunday morning after he suffered an AMI during exercise. Major Waqar who was incidentally at AFIC at that time tried to resuscitate him in the CCU. ECG was showing a flat line indicating absence of any cardiac activity. Dr. Ashur Khan says, he joined Dr. Waqar and we continued CPR for half an hour alongwith other emergency lifesaving drugs which were administered. To our surprise ECG signals appeared on the monitor. We immediately got a 12-lead ECG done which showed evidence of Acute Myocardial Infarction. Pulse and Blood pressure were still not recordable. We did coronary angiogram to establish diagnosis and an intra-aortic balloon pump was also introduced as a supportive measure by one of the cardiac surgeons. Emergency coronary angiogram showed the left anterior descending artery full of blood clot. However, all these efforts failed to revive him. Despite all evidence suspicious were raised and a political issue was made out of it. My statement alongwith some other specialists of AFIC regarding the cause of his death was recorded by the Supreme Court. Strange news appeared in the media which reported the names of some senior AMC officers who were not even on the posted strength of AFIC that they supervised the treatment of COAS, who were actually not there. Gen. Zulfikar who was retired by

Gen.Asif Nawaz early on some personal strife was also involved in the treatment to save his life.

Gen. Masoodul Rehman Kiani cardiac surgeon in his autobiography has also devoted a full chapter to the death of Gen.Asif Nawaz Janjua. Physicians are usually conservative but surgeons on the other hand are more courageous and daring. Hence what Gen.Ashur Khan has tried to say in between the lines, Gen.Kiani has said it bluntly? It appears attempts were made to involve Mian Nawaz Sharif in the death of Gen.Asif Nawaz.¹ It also strengthens the allegation that someone has been after Mian Nawaz Sharif since long and this was yet another attempt to implicate him which could not succeed due to strong medical evidence of Gen.Asif Nawaz's death due to AMI.

Dr. Ashur Khan retired from AFIC in July 2001 after a distinguished active service of thirty-three years in the Army. He had an exemplary farewell party in the traditional style including the "Jolly Good Fellow" traditional ceremony. Second farewell reception in his honour was hosted by Principal Army Medical College Maj. Gen. Ajab Khan. The last few pages of the autobiography will be extremely useful and informative for healthcare professionals wherein Dr. Ashur Khan talks about his experience of looking after patients and gives some very useful tips to the practicing physicians. Having achieved all that he has not forgotten his native village and city and he still regularly visits Kohat to treat patients free or charge highly subsidized fee and the patients are lucky to get specialized cardiac care and they do not have to travel to Peshawar or Rawalpindi-Islamabad. Those who need some interventional procedures are referred or he himself looks after them at Heart International Hospital where he practices at present with his other colleagues.

Dr. Ashur Khan got married soon after his return from Indian POW camps. One of his sons Lt. Col. Faisal is ophthalmologist while the other Dr. Adil, is a consultant neurosurgeon.

The book contains numerous photographs including some rare ones showing the author with many dignitaries, family members and friends. One of the rare photographs shows Prof. Nasiruddin Azam Khan (physically small stature) in the center

with his physically tall stature professional colleagues Prof. S. A. Raza and Prof. S. A. R. Gardezi on his left and right respectively as faculty members of Khyber Medical College. Members of the medical profession and medical students will find this book which is modestly priced, extremely useful and informative while it will add to the treasure of any library, libraries in medical institutions in particular. Despite the fact that it contains lot of useful information , had it been looked after by some Editor before publication, they might have tightened certain screws here and there to give it a much better outlook particularly splitting it into different chapters with proper headings.

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Reference: 1. Death of Gen. Asif Nawaz Janjua, Kiani Kahani an autobiography by Maj. Gen. Musud Ur Rehman Kiani, Page No. 221-225. Published by Hamza Pervaiz Printers, Kashmir Road, Rawalpindi, Pakistan 2017.

Note: Urdu translation of his autobiography titled “Jahad-o-Justijoo” was published in December 2020.

Important points

1. People in the village were generally poor but they were not unhappy.
2. People used simple diet and did lot of physical activity, nobody was overweight or obese, diseases like high blood pressure, ischemic heart disease were unknown in those days.
3. Death narrowly escaped him on more than two occasions and he saw death very closely during casualty clearance operations in East Pakistan during 1971
4. We have not learnt any lesson even after losing half the country and continue to make the same mistakes again and again
5. Dr. Mahmud Ahmad Akhtar’s unit was most active in academics. He often sacrificed his private practice because of his academic commitments and trained many postgraduates who did FCPS
6. Despite clear evidence of Gen. Asif Nawaz’s death due to AMI an attempt was made to make it a political issue.