

Ravinder Lal Kapur (1938–2006)

Ravinder Lal Kapur was born on 7 July 1938 at Lahore to Mohan Lal Kapur and Vidyavati. After completing his MBBS from the Medical College at Amritsar in 1960, Ravi took up psychiatric studies, completing DPM in 1965 at NIMHANS. He joined the Medical College at Baroda as a Lecturer in Psychiatry in 1965 for a year. Ravi Kapur went to Edinburgh in 1966 for advanced training with Morris Carstairs on a Commonwealth Fellowship in the Department of Psychiatry, completing his Ph D from Edinburgh University specializing in statistics and psychiatric research methods.

Ravi Kapur returned to India in 1970 and launched a major epidemiological research project in Manipal (jointly with Edinburgh University). The results were published in the well-known book that



he had co-authored with Carstairs in 1976 entitled *The Great Universe of Kota*. The study also developed new Indian Inter-view and Survey Schedule for epidemiological work. Ravi stayed in Manipal until 1975. During his stay, he also organized the Department of Psychiatry at Kasturba Medical College, Manipal, where he served as Professor and Head of the Department.

In 1975, he joined NIMHANS as Professor of Community Psychiatry and Head of the Department of Psychiatry. He re-organized the department and re-research, giving equal importance to biological and psychosocial factors. In 1983, Ravi Kapur decided to leave NIMHANS. It is to Ravi Kapur's credit that after leaving NIMHANS, he continued to remain active and productive. When the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS) was started in Bangalore in 1988, he was appointed as Professor of Health and Human Behaviour, and later he became the Deputy Director of NIAS in 1990. He continued as Emeritus Professor in NIAS until his death. He also continued his interest in clinical psychiatry, regularly seeing patients at his home, but now with

I had last met Kapur as he was readying to leave for Italy when he informed me with a child-like enthusiasm about writing up a book based on his ethnographic work on the Sadhus and other religious mendicants in the Himalayas. So also about 32 years ago, at the NIMHANS, he had shown me the page proof of his book *The Great Universe of Kota*. A person, who did not hesitate to admitting not to be religious, had an interest on religious people spanning for over 20 years. With a desire not to ridicule faith and commitments of the 'career-religious' persons, his interest was to understand their 'inalienable belief in god' and their conviction, which he could not share. In this stance, Kapur was consistent with his prescriptions for a good psychiatrist: an 'essential personal quality of a therapist is the ability to walk on the razor's edge between different polarities which are not reconcilable'... 'The growing affection and respect for others has catalysed a change in my preoccupations as a Therapist'. I am delighted to learn of the commitment of Malavika Kapur – his wife, to complete the book and publish it.

After my first meeting with him, I had come back with an impression that here was a person who took a great deal of interest and genuine concern for one's needs. I had been recommended by Malathi Verma, my teacher of under-graduate studies, that Kapur may have an employment opportunity for me since he had been researching on the people of Kota region in the coastal Karnataka. However, since the work had been completed and the results almost ready in a book form, Kapur had nothing to offer by way of employment. But he gave me a sound advice, of converting the time spent in desperation into productivity: 'Keep doing something or the other, even if it is unpaid... but have something good to show in your bio-data than merely the formal degrees'. By the time I had landed my first permanent employment four years later, my bio-data had grown into three pages including the listing of a research paper and a book as my publications.

As far as I was concerned, he belonged to an exclusive Club of intellectual glitterati not only of Bangalore but also in the country and elsewhere.

Kapur was a man full of humour, and generosity. About the latter, I may recall an instance. On a visit to his house once, I was admiring a miniature earthen replica of a castle in Edinburgh. I was mentally comparing that piece with the one I had at home, that of Castle of Sterling, and mentioned that to Kapur. As I was taking leave of him, he handed me a small box that contained the object of my admiration. He said that the two would make a good pair!

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a special focus on psychotherapy. From 1985 to 2000, he made a number of serious psychosocial studies and published articles on topics like creativity among Indian scientists; mind of terrorists in Punjab and Kashmir; psychological roots of violence; alienation of youth in present-day India, etc. Perhaps his most unusual and profound work was the psychological and social study of Sanyasis or holy men living in the Himalayas under an ICMR project which took him to remote areas like Rishikesh, Gangotri, Badrinath, etc. I last heard him on this topic in September 2006 barely two months before his untimely demise, at a joint Indo-Pak Punjab Psychiatric Conference in Ludhiana. He was planning to write a book on the topic and had gone to Bellagio, Italy on a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship to complete it when he suffered a heart attack and died within a week of his visit. Fortunately, he was able to present the topic to his colleagues in Bellagio, which was greatly appreciated. That was his last academic lecture.

Kapur was a Fellow of many prestigious professional organizations like Indian Psychiatric Society, National Academy of Medical Sciences, Royal College of Psychiatrists, etc. He was a Fellow of the Indian Academy of Sciences, Bangalore since 1977. He was a Visiting Professor at IISc in 1983. He was a visiting professor at the Harvard University. In 1986, as Advisor to World Health Organization (WHO), he went to Alexandria, Egypt as a WHO consultant to conduct a mental health programme in Somalia.

Kapur's lasting legacy is how he brought science, medicine and culture closer to each other in India and laid the foundation of a multidisciplinary approach for many vexed psychosocial issues of our time.

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