**The Passing Away of a Legend**

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Born in a royal family with his mother, Abida Sultaan, as the crown princess and his maternal grandfather, Nawab Hamidullah Khan as the ruler of the culturally rich, communally harmonious and economically prosperous state of Bhopal in India on 29 March 1934, Shaharyar Khan left for Pakistan at the age of 16. He never looked back. After he graduated from Cambridge, he joined the Foreign Service of Pakistan in 1957.

On this Pakistan Day, the 23 March, Shaharyar Khan, a legend in the Foreign Service of Pakistan, and a diplomat of international repute, passed away at the age of 89. He brilliantly served Pakistan for over 37 years in various diplomatic positions, including Ambassador to Jordon, France and the United Kingdom, and retired as Foreign Secretary in April 1994. He continued to serve Pakistan in a different position as Chairman Pakistan Cricket Board from 2003-2007 and 2014-2017; honing his diplomatic skills to promote the sport. He was a passionate lover of the game.

After his retirement as Foreign Secretary, Mr Shaharyar Khan was appointed as the UN Secretary General’s Special Envoy to Rwanda – the country which saw the gruesome genocide of a minority ethnic tribe. Shocked by the enormity of the genocidal killings of the Tutsi tribe and the apathy of the international community and UN to the tragedy, he converted his diary notes into a book, “The Shallow Graves of Rwanda” to preserve the record for future historians. He knew that like many other human tragedies, this genocide would also fade away from the memory of the world leaders. The book provides shocking details of the gory mayhem perpetrated against an ethnic minority with the connivance of the Hutu-led government.

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Once free from the rigours of his diplomatic assignments, Shaharyar M Khan diverted his focus to the compilation of the unique history of his royal family in which four Begums had successively ruled the state for over a century from 1819-1926. His voluminous book – the Begums of Bhopal – is a valuable treatise on the rule of the female Nawabs (rulers) of Bhopal. This period witnessed a revival of the Islamic cultural ethos and promotion of education endearing the ruling Begums in the Indian Muslim and non-Muslim circles.

He also edited the memoirs of his mother titled “The Rebel Princess”. Shaharyar M. Khan, as usual, was kind enough to post me a copy of the book. Princess Abida Sultaan writes in the preface of her book “I am eighty-nine years old and have written my memoirs with the help of a daily diary that I have kept for seventy-one years – since 1930. These diaries have enabled me to reconstruct the story of my life – a story that has spanned the glorious era of the princely states, the turmoil in India as the British withdrew and the trauma of abandoning my hearth, family and heritage in Bhopal to begin a new life in Pakistan. It has been a long journey – colourful, adventurous, and not always rewarding”.

The epilogue of the book reveals her utter disillusionment with the saddening state of affairs in Pakistan. Her laments are clear and loud that her chosen land has been encircled by hyenas that have been hungrily feasting on its flesh and bones at all levels. The book is a precious piece of the Sub-continent history and a must-read.

Though a diplomat par excellence and a public servant of high calibre, the true worth of the Late Shaharyar Khan did not lie in the high diplomatic positions he held during his career, it was his unpretentious, humble, kind and affectionate disposition and humane approach to bureaucratic administration and human resources development that set him apart from his peers. He consciously took an interest in the career of his juniors willingly encouraging, guiding and mentoring them. His entire career as a public servant reflected these human and leadership qualities, and the high standards of public service.

When my first book “A Voice in the Wilderness: Memoirs and Reflections” was published in 2017, I posted a copy of it to the Late Shaharyar Khan in Pakistan Cricket Board. Within a week, I received a long handwritten letter from him. I quote a small excerpt from his letter “I hasten to thank you for the excellent book on your memoirs. I have read and finished it from cover to cover. Your diplomatic experiences were riveting but more interesting still were your thoughts and asides on Sindh’s history, its culture, and its politics. Your childhood and school days in Shahdadkot, Larkana were fascinating, and the fact that through sheer determination and hard work, you made it to the higher rung of your profession, speaks volumes. Your assessment of different peoples (within Ministry) and cultures – Africa, Central Europe, and Central Asia – was revealing”.

During my posting in Lahore, I had the privilege of meeting Princess Abida Sultaan too in December 1993. This was occasioned by the marriage of Late Shaharyar Khan’s sons. The Princess was coming from Karachi by a PIA flight. Shaharyar Khan was also present at the airport. When the plane landed, he went to stand at the bottom of the ladder. As the door opened and the tall, slim, elegant, all smiles and affectionate, Princess Abida Sultaan appeared; the gleaming face of Shaharyar Khan betrayed the depth of his devotion and reverence for his mother.

The Princess taking measured and dignified steps with her one hand on the railing of the ladder came down and held her son’s head in her frail hands talking to him in a soft and sweet voice. I felt strangely overawed while being introduced to the Princess. Though simply dressed, she illustrated in her subtle way the cultural beauty, the civilizational strength and the traditional honour and dignity of her royal family. I still vividly remember her endearing and graceful figure and her affectionate smiles. Years later, in her passing away, I felt a deep sense of personal loss.

Today, I feel the same loss. Goodbye Shaharyar Khan.

*The author was a member of the Foreign Service of Pakistan and he has authored two books.*