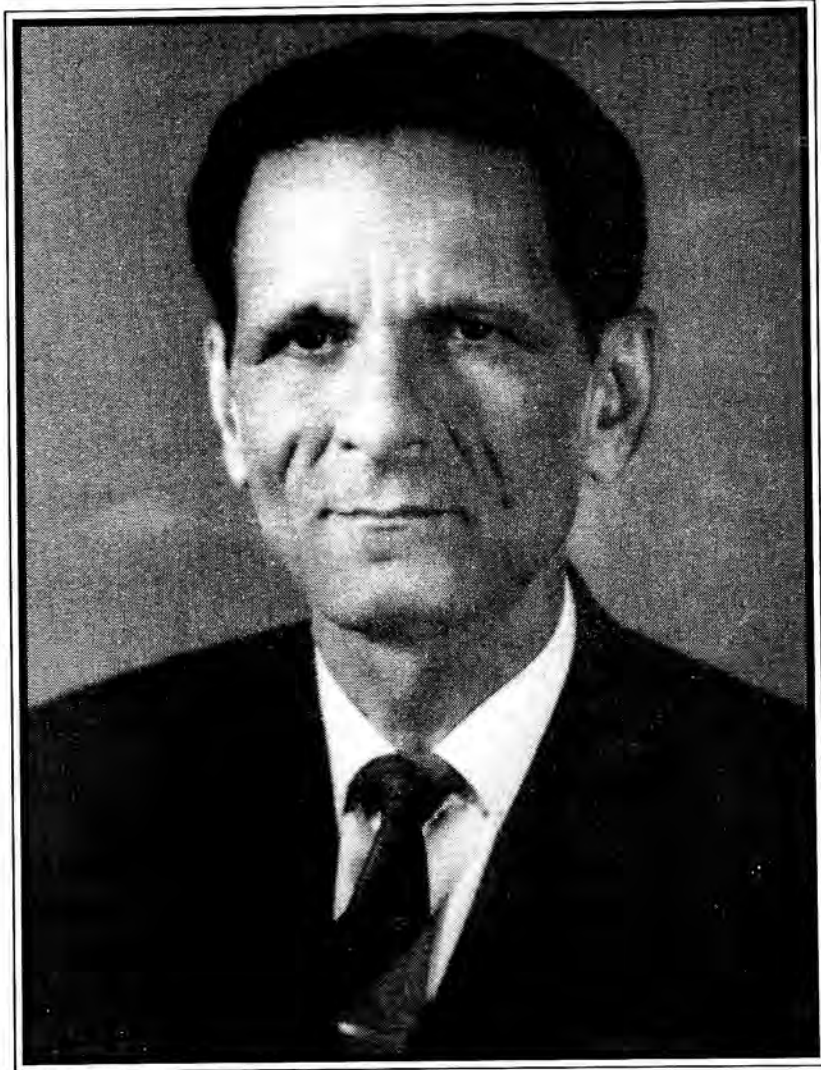


# **ABRAR MUSTAFA KHAN**

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Abdur Kalam





# **ABRAR MUSTAFA KHAN**

**(1918-2004)**

**Elected Fellow 1979**

## **FAMILY BACKGROUND AND EARLY EDUCATION**

**A**BRAR MUSTAFA KHAN was born in a reputed Pathan family of Khurja, a town known for its world-famous potteries and ceramics. It is situated in district Bulandshahar, Uttar Pradesh, not so far away from New Delhi. He was the youngest son of Haji Mohammad Mustafa Khan and Ms Mubarak Khatoon, a leading *Zamindar* and orchadist of west UP. His great grandfather Muhammad Rahmat Khan was a close friend and associate of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, the Founder of the Aligarh Muslim University in 1920. Both of them were employed by the British Government and had worked together. The early education of Dr Khan was in a traditional Muslim *madarsa*, named Madarsa-e-Qasmia, after which he was admitted to the Government High School, Bulandshahar from where he passed Matriculation.

After successfully completing his High School education he was sent to the historical Aligarh Muslim University for higher studies. From AMU, he passed Intermediate, BSc (Science) and MSc (Botany) Examinations in the years 1938, 1940 and 1942 respectively. Upon obtaining his Masters degree, he preferred joining research in Botany under the guidance of an eminent teacher of the Department Dr Rafiq Ahmad Khan, who himself was a PhD from Cambridge University in UK.

## **PROFESSIONAL CAREER**

Prior to the completion of PhD degree, Dr AM Khan was appointed a Lecturer in the Women's College of the Aligarh Muslim University in 1944. Along with his teaching assignment in Women's College, he was also given some responsibility of teaching on a part-time basis as a Lecturer in the newly established Agriculture College at Aligarh. Dr. Khan continued to remain in these positions till June 1948. At that point of time he got an opportunity to proceed abroad for advanced research work in the USA, in the Department of Plant Pathology at the University of Minnesota, under the guidance of world-renowned scientist, Professor Elvin Charles Stakman. The laboratory of Professor Stakman those days was like a Mecca for Plant Pathological research. Professor Stakman's name had also figured in a book "The Hundred Most Important People" by Dr Donald Robinson. Within a short period of two years and based on this hard work, Professor Khan was awarded the PhD degree in 1950. 145





doctoral work under Professor Stakman concerned the deficiency of bivalent ions namely; Calcium and Magnesium predisposed soybean and pea varieties to the attack of *Rhizoctonia solani*. Part of his thesis on this problem was published by the University of Minnesota as a Bulletin of the Experimental Station which was a rare thing and showed the importance of his research work. Upon his return from USA in 1950, he joined his parent Department of Botany, AMU as a Senior Lecturer and initiated research in Plant Pathology, a subject on which he had gained valuable experience in the United States. Plant Pathology till then was rather a neglected field of study in India and more so in Aligarh. Based on the experience of his research in USA, he was promoted as a Reader in Botany in 1953.

In the post-independence era, at the time when Dr Zakir Hussain (who later became the President of India) was the Vice-Chancellor of AMU, a number of very reputed academicians, both in Science and other faculties adored the chairs such as Professors Reyat Khan, a student of famous botanist Professor P Maheshwari; Kafil Ahmad Choudhary FNA, and AM Khan FNA himself in the Department of Botany; Professor MB Mirza FASc, M Afzaal Md Qadri, MA Basir, S Mashhood Alam, SZ Qasim FNA in Zoology; Professor PS Gill FNA, Rais Ahmad in Physics; Professor MO Farooq, AR Kidwai (who later became the Governor of Bihar, West Bengal and Haryana), WU Malik in Chemistry; Professor SM Shah in Mathematics; Professor PN Ganju FNA in Geology, etc. Some very eminent persons were also in other faculties, viz., Professor M Habib and Noorul Hassan (who became the Education Minister in the Government of India and later the Governor of West Bengal and Orrisa), Professors KA Nizami, Rasheed Ahmad Siddiqi, Hadi Hassan, Nazir Ahmad, DP Mukherjee and A Bose etc.

At the time when Professor AM Khan had returned to Aligarh from the USA, the Department of Botany had some excellent teachers, but it had not accomplished much in research. In reality, it is he who had initiated the traditions of research in the Department particularly on certain aspects of Plant Pathology. The first five students who obtained the PhD degrees in Botany were all his research scholars. He had also initiated some work on the etiology of whip-smut of sugarcane; anthracnose disease of several other crops; rust of maize and oats as also some bacterial and viral diseases of pulse crops. He carried out work on the powdery mildew disease of cucurbits caused by some fungi that resulted into heavy losses to this crop. Professor Khan found that both these seldom produce a perfect stage in nature as studies conducted in growth chambers at low temperatures and low humidity showed that it favoured production of a perfect stage. Through this finding, Professor Khan was able to demonstrate that a perfect stage in nature is rarely produced in the plains. He and his group of students tested all varieties of cultivated cucurbits and identified the sources of resistance against the powdery mildew disease. Impressed with the research work carried out by Professor Khan and his co-workers, the university authorities sanctioned him money for the construction of a world class glass-house





in the Department of Botany for conducting further advanced research work in Plant Pathology. This glass-house had Wisconsin type of controlled temperature facilities, something which even today is extremely rare in many institutions in India. The foundation of this glass-house was laid by Dr. Zakir Hussain himself and it was intact until the year 2006 when it was unfortunately decided by the Department to raise it to the ground in order to make way for the construction of a Committee Room for the staff of the Department of Botany. An important facility and a landmark of the University thus suddenly disappeared which many from the older generations of AMU had always remembered.

During the period when Dr Khan joined Aligarh, upon his return from USA, research in the area allied to Plant Pathology, namely Plant Nematology, was making much news in the Europe and USA. Being at Minnesota, Professor Khan would surely have been very well aware of this new and emerging field of study. As he was deeply focused on his own area of research possibly he did not venture into this field until the accomplishment of his PhD work. Once he was back in the Department of Botany at AMU, he had the time and possibility of taking up research work in this area as well. The nematodes inhabiting soil, attack plants thereby causing extensive damage to their roots. Some species may even invade the aerial parts inflicting more damage and limiting the agricultural productivity to a great extent. The symptoms of nematode diseases are incidentally not much different from the diseases caused by other plant pathogens such as bacteria, fungi and viruses. Many times the nematodes may act together with these organisms as well. The plant pathologists, parasitologists, helminthologists, entomologists, agricultural scientists and others had all become keenly interested in 1950's in studying nematodes. Dr AM Khan from the Department of Botany and Professor MA Basir from the Department of Zoology emerged as the leading scientists in the field of Nematology in India.

## SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS

Professor Khan, his colleagues and students in Botany made significant contributions on several aspects of Nematology. These include investigations on the effects of organic amendments to the soil for controlling plant-parasitic nematodes, fungus-nematode and nematode-nematode interactions, crop-rotation trials, population dynamics of nematode parasites under various cropping patterns, nutritional status of host plants in relation to disease development caused by nematodes. The group led by Dr Khan in the Department of Botany did commendable work on the pathogenicity and disease potential of several species of plant-parasitic nematodes. Further, they also studied the morphometric variations in nematodes under different ecological stresses besides routine surveys that were carried out extensively to assess the distribution and population levels of nematodes in different parts of India particularly in the northern state of India, namely Uttar Pradesh. This work led to the description of a number of new species and some





genera of nematodes by his group. This resulted in the publication of many research papers and articles in Indian Journals and some in the foreign as well. Their work has been cited in some books and other Nematology publications. In spite of the fact that he gave more attention to his "second love" Plant Nematology, instead of his "first love" Plant Pathology, he still maintained deep interest in disease causing fungi. He and his co-workers made some commendable contributions on powdery mildew disease of cucurbits and also those of smut fungi. Their publications on powdery mildew of cucurbits did generate some interest in this area of research in different Plant Pathological laboratories. Their work on the complexes involving nematodes and parasitic fungi was initiated in the 1970s. It was observed that the loss was more severe when caused by either of the pathogens alone. In complex involving root-knot nematodes and *Rhizobium* sp. on *Phaseolus*, it was observed that the presence of root-nodule bacterium mitigated ill effects of the nematodes.

Professor Khan while studying the effects of concomitant inoculation between the three categories of nematodes, namely endoparasitic, semi-endoparasitic and ectoparasitic, inoculated tomato seedlings with four different populations of each nematode types. He observed that the rate of increase in population and dry weight of plants declined with an increase in inoculum levels and there was a tendency for the production of more males. In concomitant inoculation of *Meloidogyne incognita* and *Rotylenchus reniformis*, the populations of both nematodes was suppressed at all combinations that were used. The highest decrease was observed in root-knot as compared to the reniform nematodes. Similar suppression was noticed in *R. reniformis* and *Tylenchorhynchus brassicae* as compared to root-knot and stunt nematodes in all the combinations. Marked increase of males of root-knot and reniform nematodes was noticed in concomitant inoculations as against mono-specific inoculations. The production of males in mono-specific inoculation and in combination of *T. brassicae* did not, however, show much change. He found that rotations in the sequence of eggplant-chilli-tomato; okra-chilli-chilli; okra-tomato-chilli, enhanced root-knot populations. Rotation with *Tagetes* and other members of *Compositae* and non-host crops is highly effective in reducing the population levels of majority of the plant-parasitic nematodes.

For controlling plant-parasitic nematodes with chemicals (nematicides), Professor Khan made use of the University Farm at old Scindia Fort. He set up experiments at several other locations on farmers' fields in the districts of Aligarh and Bulandshahar. Different nematicides were used in these experiments which were meant to show the farming community that the species of nematodes are responsible for decrease in the crop productivity which was directly related to the income of the farmers. This was the best way to convince them of the losses due to plant-parasitic nematodes. It was largely due to this convincing type of evidence shown to the farmers that they agreed to allow Professor Khan to use their fields for carrying out his trials. All this helped in the disease management due to nematodes in various crops in Western UP. The best result that he obtained were by using the





nematicide, DD. Seedlings, raised in beds treated with nematicides and later transplanted to naturally infested fields remained relatively free from the attack of nematodes. Professor Khan also found out that foliar and bare root dip applications of some systemic nematicides inhibited the root-knot development on all vegetable crops that he had tested. However, in view of the high cost, pollution hazards and difficulties involved in their application by the farmers, this programme was ultimately abandoned by Dr Khan. Instead, the application of organic amendments in the form of residues, stable dung, green manure, different kinds of oil-cakes, viz. neem, groundnut, castor, mustard, mahua, etc., were recommended to the farmers, as their efficacy for controlling plant-parasitic nematodes was already well established.

In order to further reduce the cost of application, Professor Khan used oil-cakes mixed with inorganic fertilizers. Such mixtures proved to be equally effective in controlling nematodes. Water soluble fractions of oil-cakes and deoiled-cakes were toxic to a variety of nematodes. Their chemical analyses proved that they contained phenols hydroquinones, ketones, aldehydes, etc. Hydroquinones and phenol related compounds were toxic *in vitro*, pre-and post-inoculation. The dipping of roots in hydroquinones suppressed the population levels of juveniles of root-knot as well as other nematodes. The effect of several phenolic compounds was also tested by his group of researchers. The compounds which had OH group at para- or ortho-positions proved to be more toxic to nematodes than those having OH group at meta-position.

Professor Khan in 1960 approached the Colombo Plan Authorities to depute some eminent nematologist to AMU so as to enable the university to carry out its research work in this discipline on more organized and advanced scientific lines. As a result of this request, Dr FGW Jones, Head of Nematology Department of the Rothamsted Experimental Station, United Kingdom came to Aligarh in 1961. During his stay in Aligarh for about a month, Dr Jones helped the Departments of Botany and Zoology in reshaping their existing infrastructural facilities in Nematology on modern lines as per the then prevailing standards. He was also able to redefine and reshape the future research programmes of these two very important Departments of the Faculty of Science. Young and emerging scientists like, MR Siddiqi, MS Jairajpuri, E Khan, SI Husain and some others were greatly benefited by this help. These scientists themselves became important world leaders in Nematology in due course of time. In 1964, again in response to Professor Khan's request the Rockefeller Foundation agreed to finance an International Nematology Course at IARI in which some very distinguished nematologists of that period, namely, Dr DJ Raski from the Department of Nematology, University of California, Davis, USA. Drs FGW Jones and JB Goodey from the Rothamsted Experimental Station, Harpenden, UK participated. The course was jointly sponsored by the Aligarh Muslim University and the Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi. It was also a great success indeed and a very positive step towards the development of Nematology in India.





In 1963, the Rockefeller Foundation awarded a travel grant to Professor Khan to visit important centres of research in Plant Nematology in Europe and the USA. After visiting the nematological laboratories in UK, Belgium and the Netherlands in Europe, he proceeded to the United States and visited several Universities such as Cornell, Yale, Rhode Island, North Carolina, Florida, Wisconsin, Minnesota, the three campuses of University of California and the University of Hawaii. He spent about a month at Beltsville, Maryland. During the course of his visit, he acquainted himself with all that was required to promote nematological research in India in general and Aligarh in particular.

While Professor Khan was in the Netherlands, he made a request to Dr Oostenbrink, the then Leader and Head of Nematology Laboratories in the State Agricultural University, Wageningen to run an Advance Nematology Course in India like the one he was having in his own institution. On coming back to Aligarh from his trip, he invited Dr Oostenbrink to visit Aligarh. His visit was materialized through the grant sanctioned by the University Grants Commission. While Dr Oostenbrink was in India, he agreed to the request made to him earlier by Professor Khan. Ultimately a contract was signed between the two Governments to run, South-East Asia Postgraduate Nematology Courses for promoting Nematology in India and South-East Asian countries. The Dutch Government not only provided equipments costing several lakhs of rupees and scholarships to foreign participants, but also lent the services of Dr M Oostenbrink, Mr JA van Berkum, JJ's Jacob for the first course which was held in 1967. In all, seven such courses were held in which large number of in-service Indian and South-East Asian scientists were trained and many of them today happen to be heading Nematology in different Agricultural Universities of their countries.

## AWARDS AND HONOURS

Dr. Khan was elected Member/Fellow of several learned Societies/Academies including the Indian National Science Academy (INSA) at New Delhi. He was also elected as the First President of the Nematological Society of India as also that of the Society for the Advancement of Botany. He served as the Chairman of the ICAR Panel on Nematology for many years. In recognition of his commendable contributions to Nematology, he was awarded the Rafi Ahmad Kidwai Memorial Prize for the biennium 1968-69 and 1970-71. Professor Khan served as the Sectional President of Agricultural Sciences Section during the 71st session of the Indian Science Congress. He delivered the XVIII Mundukut Memorial Award Lecture that was organized by the Indian Phytopathological Society. The Haryana Agricultural University in Hisar also honoured him for his services to Plant Nematology.

Professor Khan was Chief Investigator of several research projects funded by the various R & D agencies, like ICAR, CSIR, UGC and PL-480 funds of USA. Some of the major projects that he had successfully handled are "Studies on plant-parasitic nematodes associated with vegetables crops in Uttar Pradesh"; "Control of diseases





caused by nematodes by the application of oilcakes, manures"; "Studies on powdery mildew resistance in cucurbits" (all these three were financed by the PL-480 funds of USDA) and "Nematode pests of crops and their control" which was an ICAR coordinated research project.

He was a very widely travelled nematologist. Professor Khan visited many different leading Plant Nematology laboratories in Germany, United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Belgium, USA and Canada. He also arranged visits of many eminent nematologists of the world to Aligarh and maintained enduring relationship with them. Professor Khan participated in several international conferences and symposia. Besides his academic involvements and pre-occupations, Professor Khan was also engaged in corporate life of AMU. He was Vice-Chairman and Secretary of the Games Committee of AMU for many years. During his student life he was awarded colours of the University in cricket and tennis. He was the Vice-President of the UP Cricket Association for well over a decade. Professor Khan had served as Provost of the Sir Ross Masood hall, etc.

### **AS A PERSON**

Professor Khan had a pleasant personality. His friendly gestures and sense of humour left abiding impact on one and all who happened to meet him. He had inspired and moulded a generation of students. His work and efforts in the field of Plant Nematology will serve as a stimulus for greater efforts and excellence in research in future. A number of students qualified for the award of PhD degrees under his guidance. He along with his students had published a very large number of research papers in journals of repute.

### **LAST DAYS**

In the last two-three years of his life, he suffered from an attack of Alzheimer's. When he breathed his last, he had become very weak and suffered a stroke. He attained an age of 86 years upon his death on 9th of December 2004. He is survived by his wife and five children, two sons and three daughters. His elder son, Dr Absar M Khan is a Professor of Entomology in AMU and presently the Chairman of the Zoology Department and the Dean of Faculty of Life Sciences.

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