

# Dr. Onkar N. Srivastava: A Tribute and Eulogy

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**P**rof. Onkar N. Srivastava graduated from King George's Medical College, Lucknow, in 1957. After that, he did his DPM in the UK in 1961, MD Psychiatry from Bihar University in 1969, and MRC Psych in 1971. After working as Reader in Psychiatry at Government Medical College, Srinagar, Kashmir, from 1962 to 65, he joined Banaras Hindu University (BHU) in 1965. He was in BHU for 12 years until March 1977, when he went to the Netherlands on extended leave and subsequently resigned from his post. After that, he was in the Netherlands with his family. From 1978 to 1990, he was the Psychiatrist and Head of Admission, Pavilion, Psychiatrisch Ziekenhuis 'Vogelenzang', Bennebroek, The Netherlands; and then from 1990-1994, Psychiatrist and Director, Residency Training (A-Opleider), Psychiatrisch Ziekenhuis Rosenberg, The Hague, The Netherlands. His wife, a very pleasant lady, passed away on 8 Jan '22. Dr. ON Srivastava could not bear the great loss and left for heavenly abode soon after on 13 Jan '22. Clearly they lived for each other.



**9 Nov 1934 - 13 Jan 2022**

## Creation of the Department of Psychiatry

Dr. ON Srivastava was the founder of the Department of Psychiatry at the BHU, Varanasi. The story of the development of the Psychiatry Department is a story of high drama replete with despairing but fortunately fleeting moments and a slow but unrelenting march to success. Prof Srivastava joined as a Reader in Psychiatry in the Department of Medicine in 1965. A dreamy-eyed psychiatrist with his pipe dreams, no less wild than those of his patients, took up the challenge. A psychiatric clinic was started in the space made available by the medical outpatients department (MOPD) in the afternoons when that department did not function. Patients began to grow, and so also the workload. A couple of rooms were found in the Eye Hospital, and then a few rooms in the Isolation (Infectious) Ward building were made available. With regard to staff, help first came in from an Intern, who was posted for one month on a rotational basis. A social worker later joined, initially part-time, and then worked full time.

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A house physician and a post-graduate student of Internal Medicine followed suit, both on rotation. Still, later a Clinical Registrar in Psychiatry joined. Modified electro-convulsive therapy was then introduced. In December 1970, a 12-bedded inpatient Unit was added, and a Child Guidance Clinic also started. In April '70, a Lecturer in Psychiatry joined, and soon after, a part-time occupational therapist was made available. Finally, the department was inaugurated on 16 Nov 1971 by Prof. George Morris Carstairs, the President of the World Federation for Mental Health. On this day, psychiatry was given the status of a separate department in this Institute of Medical Sciences, BHU. The creation of the Department of Psychiatry was a great day for the progress of Psychiatry in this country as Sir Sunderlal Hospital, BHU, Varanasi, has a vast catchment area. In the state of Uttar Pradesh, this was the second Psychiatry Department, opened after that in King George's Medical College, Lucknow.

## **MD (Psychiatry) Program**

In September '71, a Postgraduate Training Programme, MD (Psychiatry), was launched by the efforts of Prof Srivastava, and with this, 2 more post-graduates entered the scene. Thereafter, bit by bit, expansion in infrastructure and services took place.

## **Projects**

In the early 70s, the department received a Dutch Project involving a sum of over Rs. 2,000,000. The project had the collaboration of the Universities of Amsterdam, Utrecht, and BHU and was for assisting in the development of psychiatry at BHU. Several posts (e.g., Reader in Biological Psychiatry, EEG Recordist, and EEG Technologist) were sanctioned by University Grants Commission to the department under this project. Even though the project was terminated mid-way, the posts continued.

Prof O.N. Srivastava was the Principle investigator of the multicentered project, 'Drug Abuse in College Students,' sponsored by the Department of Social Welfare, Government of India.

## **Visit of Stalwarts to the Department**

The towering personality of Prof ON Srivastava attracted many stalwarts to the department. In the inaugural address of the Department, Prof ON Srivastava expressed his deep sense of gratitude to Dr. Norman Sartorius, Dr. J Gallagher, Dr. WA Kohlmeyer, Dr. F Van Ree, Dr. William Kinsley, Dr. Mills, Dr. Robert Grennel, and last but not least, Dr. GM Carstairs.

## **International Recognition**

All along Prof ON Srivastava's professional expertise was duly recognized.

- 1996-14: Psychiatric expert in the panel of Medical experts of European Space Centre (ESA), Noordwijk, Netherlands
- 2000-14: Psychiatric expert in the panel of Medical experts of European Patent Office (EPO), Rijswijk, Netherlands
- 2000-14: Psychiatric expert in the panel of Medical experts of International Court of Justice for Former Yugoslavia, The Hague, Netherlands
- 2000-14: Psychiatric expert in the panel of Medical experts of International Court of Justice, The Hague, Netherlands.
- Award was conferred at the Indian Diaspora Conference.
- Nov 2021: Elected as Fellow of the Royal College of Psychiatrists (FRCPsych)

## **International Reflections on Noble Character**

These are recommendations from his colleagues for nomination as FRCPsych.

"Prof Dr Onkar N. Srivastava is a trustworthy expert in the field of general psychopathology, with an impressive track record in the Netherlands, where he helped to pave the way for the rehabilitation of clinical psychiatry during the heyday of the anti-psychiatric movement, as well as in India, where he founded the Department of Psychiatry at Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, under even less favorable circumstances. He was nonetheless

appointed Professor of Psychiatry at Banaras Hindu University and (later) acted as advisor for the Indian government testifies to his perseverance, expertise, and well-earned prestige. At Parnassia Psychiatric Institute, Dr. Srivastava is moreover remembered as a warm and humane colleague who went to great lengths to optimize patient care and the well-being of those working with him."

"As a Reader in Psychiatry in the Department of Medicine at the Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India, Prof Dr. O.N. Srivastava set up Psychiatric Services from scratch. These became very popular and attracted patients from far and wide. These services did a humongous job of minimizing the stigma attached to psychiatry. This awakened a new hope in the public that psychiatric illnesses too are treatable and patients can be rehabilitated. The quality of the psychiatric services, including the liaison service, brought respect for psychiatry in the medical community of the Institute of Medical Sciences, BHU."

"He worked hard towards establishing an independent department of Psychiatry against all odds and opposition even from the Head of the Department of Medicine. The University Grants Commission had appointed a visiting committee to look into the future needs of the Institute of Medical Sciences, BHU. Despite all obstacles, he could convince the visiting committee that an independent department of Psychiatry was urgently needed. It was not only essential for providing much-needed psychiatric services but also for improving the quality of medical education in general. The committee agreed with his arguments and recommended the creation of a department of psychiatry. It created posts of a professor, readers, and lecturers."

"Prof. G.M. Carstairs, the then Chairman of the World Federation of Mental Health, inaugurated the new department in 1971. Prof. Srivastava also started an MD course in Psychiatry and became accredited by the Medical Council. Respect for psychiatry as a medical specialty grew to such an extent that it became a tradition for the topper of the MBBS class to opt for specialization in psychiatry. Professor Srivastava became the first Head of the Department of Psychiatry in BHU."

"In the Netherlands, he worked first as a consultant psychiatrist and supervisor for trainee psychiatrists at the Psychiatric Hospital Vogelenzang in Bennebroek. In the seventies, when he joined this hospital, he found it to be still reeling from the trauma of World War II and the Nazi time. According to the International Classification of Diseases or the DSM, diagnosing patients was looked down upon as some form of fascism. The sphere in the admission unit, of which he was in charge, was greatly colored by the anti-psychiatric movement. It was, therefore, his job to bring greater precision to the diagnosis of patients and improve the standard of care. The aspirant psychiatrists greatly appreciated his teaching (called arts assistants), and they vied to be taught and supervised by Prof Srivastava. Other consultants in the hospital too thought highly of his clinical acumen and sought his advice for their difficult cases and other clinical stalemates."

"Ultimately, Prof Srivastava became the Director of the residency training program at the Psychiatric Hospital Rosenberg where he trained a great number of psychiatrists practicing psychiatry today in the Netherlands."

Prof O.N. Srivastava has been a teacher of teachers. He has left behind a great legacy that will be continued by aspiring young mental health professionals in India and the Netherlands.