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THE SHUNNED HERO

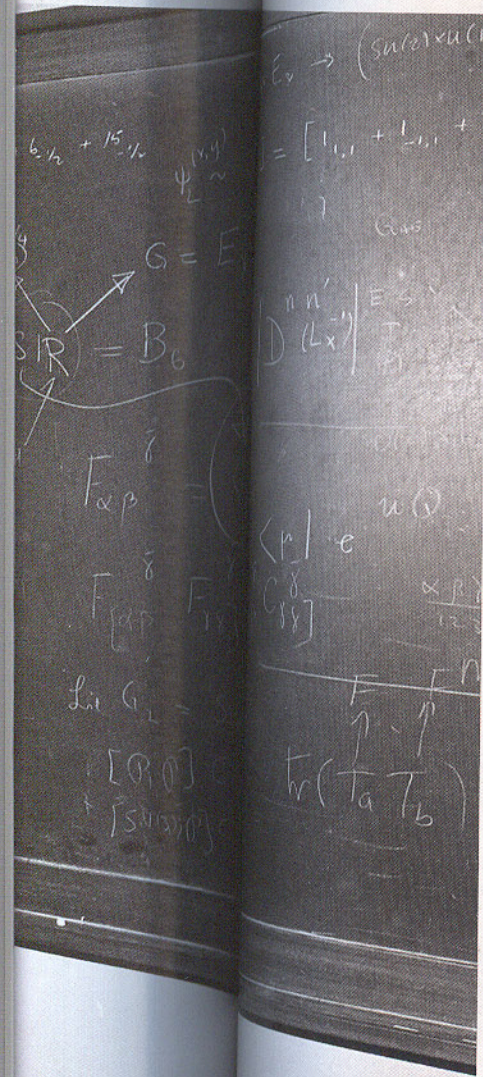
BY ZARRAR SAID

ZARRAR SAID SHEDS LIGHT ON DR. ABDUS SALAM'S FASCINATING STORY THAT SHOULD BE AN INSPIRATION FOR A MISLED NATION THAT NEEDS TO LEARN FROM HIS GREATNESS RATHER THAN SPREADING UNFOUNDED HATRED AGAINST THIS ICON OF BRILLIANCE AND PATRIOTISM.

Similar to Einstein, Abdus Salam did not speak till after he was 15-months-old. His concerned father took him to a religious scholar who prophesised that the boy would one day speak so loudly, that the whole world would listen. Abdus Salam's tale is one of fortuitous incidents, which carved out a path for intellectual brilliance. It is also due to these coincidences that Salam further developed his deep-rooted belief in God and found the Supreme Being to be ever present in his work. He practiced his

devotion through the medium of science. It is this stern private devotion, which, sadly in 1974, was tarnished and the stains of his excommunication became even more visible after his death. Salam's story is one of true inspiration but is laced with a Shakespearean tragedy. A tragedy which is often kept from the people of Pakistan. A tragedy so deeply scarring that it left Salam severely wounded till the day he died.

Abdus Salam was born into an underprivileged family in Brit



ish India in 1926. His father, Muhammad Hussein, was convinced that his son would fulfill his foretold prophecy of greatness. He introduced young Salam to poetry, literature and mathematics at an early age. While other children were learning to count to 10, Salam was memorising the multiplication table for 50.

Salam was given a small corner of his father's house to do his daily studying under candlelight. The first coincidental accidents in Salam's life took place in 1938 when his father tried to enroll him in Central Model School in Lahore for Muslim boys. Salam's credentials were beyond any comparison but the headmaster rejected his case on the grounds that Salam would be unable to cope with the affluent city boys due to his rural upbringing. Crestfallen, Hussein enrolled his son in the predominantly-Hindu Government Intermediate College in Jhang. It is there that Salam was introduced to an array of disciplines. He was familiarised with

nuclear, magnetic and electric energies. He was only shown a magnet - for other scientific equipment, he was told he would have to travel to Lahore. It would take many more years till Salam saw his first light bulb at the age of 15, a year before he published his first journal.

Consequently, Salam exceeded all expectations by placing first in the Matriculation examinations and was welcomed on the streets of Jhang by Hindu merchants who had received the joyous news before the child had himself. The hero of Jhang was awarded a scholarship by an Ahmadi group, which allowed for him to attend Government College in Lahore. There, he majored in mathematics primarily to sharpen his skills to prepare for the Indian Civil Service exam, which was his father's aspiration. A further concurrence was that due to World War II, the ICS exam had been postponed and Salam could not sit for it until after the war. Bewildered, Salam decided to make use of this time by pursuing his studies at the University of Cambridge. If it weren't for a third unlikely incident, Salam would never have had the money to attend Cambridge. Through India's Small Peasants' Welfare Fund, Salam was eligible to receive a scholarship to pursue his career in mathematics. Five scholarships were offered that year and four of the people were declared ineligible. Salam benefitted a great deal from this as after the completion of his degree, he was allowed to stay on for a year to do research. It is there that Salam managed to stumble upon theoretical and particle physics. For

Salam, there was no turning back. Salam used the additional funds to conduct lab experiments all year. Salam was also the last person to receive the scholarship as it was abolished the following year.

Incident after incident, Abdus Salam's career was carved into a gilded pathway. It is no shock that he paid huge credit to God whom he believed was responsible for this unlikely journey. Needless to say, Salam was devoutly religious. He refused the opportunity to buy a house in a posh London suburb and instead located his family to Putney so he could be close to a mosque. Salam also led Friday prayers in his self-founded International Center for Theoretical Physics, which would come as a surprise to many students of physics. Upon meeting Einstein for the first time, Salam spent the entire evening convincing Einstein of the concept of unity in Islam. Unlike his fellow Nobel laureate and staunch atheist, Steven Weinberg, Salam, in the world of physics was an outlier - he was a believer. Salam made a point to discuss the compatibility of spirituality and science and even in his Nobel acceptance speech, quoted from the Quran and boldly mentioned that "the creation of physics is the shared heritage of all mankind. East and West, North and South have equally participated in it". It is due to his passion for unison that he developed the groundbreaking unification of energies, a direct result of his hypothesis that elementary particles are no more than diverse aspects of a single primary force. There were two passions in Salam's life; one was to understand physical reality

through physics and the other was to put Islamic civilisation back on top in the world of science and technology. Sadly, only one of those passions were fulfilled in his lifetime.

TILL THE DAY HE DIED, HE HELD A PAKISTANI PASSPORT DESPITE RECEIVING OFFERS FROM VARIOUS COUNTRIES THAT WERE WILLING TO NATURALISE HIM.

Along with his piousness, Salam had an undying fondness for Pakistan. Till the day he died, he held a Pakistani passport despite receiving offers from various countries that were willing to naturalise him. Indira Gandhi too offered him the Indian nationality along with the riches of recognition. He kindly refused. Salam, despite reaching great heights in the West, decided to devote his life to his country even after winning the Nobel Prize in Physics. Salam was appointed advisor to president Ayub Khan and his successor

Yahya Khan; he was focused on developing nuclear energy and technology for cheap power sources. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's idea of nuclear energy, however, was unequivocally different. The same accidental incidents that guided him to success slowly pushed him towards his demise. Salam was painfully assigned to various antipathetic roles, one being the Punjab University's football coach.

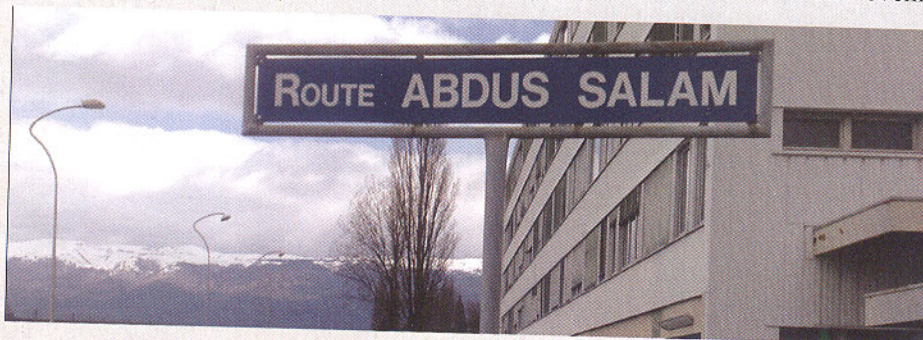
After the circumcision of Pakistan in 1971, Bhutto steered the country in a direction which irked Salam. Interests in nuclear energies were diverted to developing the nuclear bomb - which Salam wanted no part of - and Bhutto simultaneously began a movement of appeasement with the Arab states. In 1974, Bhutto congregated, in Islamabad, the leaders of the Islamic world. This totalitarian private club consisted of leaders such as Arafat, Qaddafi, King Faisal, Sadat of Egypt and Assad of Syria. To pay his membership dues and to assure the leaders of his fortitude, Bhutto went on to Islamise Pakistan. Alcohol was banned, Quran and Arabic teachings were ramped up and Hajj

“WE, THE PRESENT GENERATION, SEEM TO HAVE INHERITED A HOUSE WHICH HAS NO WINDOWS, AND ITS WALLS ARE VERY HIGH - THIS IS THE SET OF CONCEPTS WITH WHICH WE HAVE BEEN BLESSED - AND IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO KNOW WHETHER WE HAVE INHERITED A HOUSE OR A PRISON.” - PROFESSOR ABDUS SALAM.

pilgrimages were increased by state sponsorship. Bhutto drove the final nail in the coffin by excommunicating the Ahmadi sect; officially declaring them 'Non-Muslims' and heretics. On the day, Salam woefully wrote in his diary, "Declared non-Muslim, cannot cope." Instant riots erupted in the country targeting Ahmadis, including the ransacking of Salam's family-owned pharmacy in Multan. Salam instantly tendered his resignation and his last ties to Pakistan were forcefully severed. Salam was propelled to fortify his beliefs. He grew a beard and adorned the forename Muhammad. Prevalent persecutions of Ahmadis continued under Zia-ul-Haq's Sharia-inspired rule where each adult Ahmadi was forced to sign written declarations that their leader Ghulam Ahmad is 'an imposter' and all Ahmadis are 'non-Mus-

he refused to share his recognition with any country other than Pakistan. No matter what people say, "It is my country," he said. He recounted an incident where after receiving the Nobel Prize he was invited by president Zia-ul-Haq. Salam asked him how he had invited him: as a Jhangi, a Pakistani or a Punjabi? He asked the president why, in a country of Muslims, his people were made second-class citizens. Famously, Zia replied to Salam that Salam himself was a better Muslim than he. Salam fought two wars towards the end of his life; one against his government and one against PSP - regretfully, he lost both. He was sure that his life was transient and a preparation for the afterlife. He wanted to be buried in Rabwah alongside his father. In November 1996, Salam's body was flown to Pakistan

where thousands of well-wishers attended his funeral. Sadly, the only ranked government official present was a local superintendent of the Punjab Police. On his tombstone was prescribed, "Abdus Salam, the First Muslim Nobel Laureate". His grave was later violated by scornful vandals who chiselled away the word "Muslim".



A STREET IN CERN, SWITZERLAND: SALAM'S PAKISTAN REFUSED TO NAME EVEN A STREET IN HIS HONOUR WHILE OTHER COUNTRIES GARNISHED THEIR ROADS WITH HIS NAME.

lims'. However, Salam never gave up on his home country and clutched onto its memories till his last days when he was diagnosed with Progressive Supranuclear Palsy (PSP); leaving him a prisoner in his own body. The disease made him fall regularly to the point that he was made to live in a padded room. On many occasions, perturbing fits would leave him wounded. Yet, he hoped to seek refuge in his country before dying. Travelling to Pakistan in extreme illness yielded him nothing as prime minister Benazir Bhutto promised to meet him but left him stranded and heartbroken in his hotel room at the last minute after reconfirming with her advisors - the honouring of Salam would have meant the defamation of Pakistan. It is a matter of great national shame when an icon of brilliance and patriotism is dishonoured and put to disgrace as a casualty of conflicted interests.

During his last years, Salam's life became increasingly painful for himself and people who loved him. In an extremely emotional interview given to a Canadian radio channel, Salam begins, in Urdu, his explanation for holding onto his Pakistani citizenship. He kindly asks the interviewer if he could switch to Punjabi since Urdu was "really difficult" for him. Salam replied that he could not imagine taking another citizenship because

they were truly fascinating but similar circumstances emotionally tortured him later on in his life. His brilliance lay in his resistance to relinquish his quest for knowledge. He understood that civilisations that turned away from science deteriorated while those that empowered it flourished. In a world where true heroes of intellectual endeavours are often overpowered by the celebration of mediocrity, Salam's story screams out to be heard. It howls in the empty hallways of national history from which it is being eliminated. Salam's Pakistan was amputated while he was a teenager and further fractured into two when he was a promising academic. His Pakistan was then collared and chained to the hooks of betrayal. She was younger than him and had wrongfully accused him of heresy. She considered his contributions a blemish instead of her pride and expunged his name from every school book she owned. Salam's Pakistan refused to name even a street in his honour while other countries garnished their roads with his name. His Pakistan was unfaithful, while he loved her till his dying days. Even though he lies peacefully in a dustbed, in a cemetery where people constantly fling trash and human feces to pay their respects to their Ahmadi brethren, Salam continues to give to his Pakistan more than she ever gave to him. ■