

OBITUARY:

IN LOVING MEMORY OF PROFESSOR EMERITUS DR. SYED HAROON AHMED (1931–2025)
A PIONEER IN PSYCHIATRY OF PAKISTAN, ADVOCATE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND CHAMPION OF MENTAL HEALTH

NAIM SIDDIQI¹, SAIMA QURESHI²

¹M.B.B.S, MCPS, FRCP (PSYCH), HEAD, DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHIATRY, SINDH INSTITUTE OF UROLOGY AND TRANSPLANTATION, KARACHI

²M.B.B.S, FCPS, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHIATRY, DOW MEDICAL COLLEGE, KARACHI

ABSTRACT

Professor Emeritus Dr. Syed Haroon Ahmed, a towering figure in Pakistan's mental health landscape and a lifelong advocate for human rights, passed away in Karachi on Thursday, April 3, 2025. His passing marks the end of an era, but his legacy continues to shine brightly through the countless lives he touched. Throughout his career, Dr. Haroon embodied humility, grace and unwavering integrity. For nearly six decades, he championed not just mental health, but also education, social equity and human rights. His contributions have left an indelible mark on Pakistan's medical, legal, and social fabric. While his absence leaves a profound void, his vision and legacy will continue to illuminate the path for generations to come. Professor Syed Haroon Ahmed will be remembered not only as a pioneer in Pakistani psychiatry but as a man of conscience who dedicated his life to building a more humane and just society.

KEYWORDS

Syed Haroon Ahmed, Contributions, Democratic Students Federation, Psychiatry, Memory.

Professor Emeritus Dr. Syed Haroon Ahmed, a towering figure in Pakistan's mental health landscape and a lifelong advocate for human rights, passed away in Karachi on Thursday, April 3, 2025. His passing marks the end of an era, but his legacy continues to shine brightly through the countless lives he touched.

Prof. S. Haroon was born in 1931 in Jaunpur, Uttar Pradesh. He earned his MBBS degree from Dow Medical College in 1953. He went on to specialize in psychiatry at the Maudsley Hospital in the United Kingdom, setting the stage for a lifetime of service in mental health. Even in his youth, he demonstrated a commitment to social justice, founding the Democratic Students Federation (DSF) in 1950, a national platform that brought together students from across Pakistan, including East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), to advocate for equitable education and students' rights. He also co-founded the Pakistan Medical Association alongside fellow DSF members.

His return to Pakistan marked a transformative period for psychiatric care in the country. As a senior psychiatrist at Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre's Ward 20, he played a foundational role in establishing modern psychiatric services. His commitment to accessible care led to the establishment of the Pakistan

Association for Mental Health (PAMH) in 1965, an organization that continues to provide free psychiatric consultations and medication to underserved populations, as well as spread awareness and remove stigma towards mental health issues. He further strengthened the mental health profession by co-founding the Pakistan Psychiatric Society (PPS) in 1972.

In 1995, under the banner of PAMH, Dr. Haroon helped establish the Institute of Behavioural Sciences (IBS) in Karachi. IBS remains a leading center for psychiatric care, education, and research in Pakistan. A visionary in community psychiatry, Dr. Haroon passionately promoted the principle: *“Mental Health at the Doorstep of the Community.”*

Dr. Haroon’s advocacy extended far beyond medicine. He was a steadfast defender of secularism, minority rights, and civil liberties. He maintained a long-standing relationship with the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) and served as president of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. In 1998, he demonstrated remarkable moral courage by publicly opposing Pakistan’s nuclear tests, advocating instead for peace and greater people-to-people contact with India.

A defining chapter of his legacy was his leadership in overhauling mental health legislation in Pakistan. Disturbed by the antiquated Lunacy Act of 1912, Dr. Haroon spearheaded efforts that led to the passage of the Sindh Mental Health Act in 2013—the first law in the country to safeguard the rights of individuals living with mental illness, including those unjustly accused under blasphemy laws.

Throughout his career, Dr. Haroon embodied humility, grace and unwavering integrity. For nearly six decades, he championed not just mental health, but also education, social equity and human rights. His contributions have left an indelible mark on Pakistan’s medical, legal, and social fabric.

While his absence leaves a profound void, his vision and legacy will continue to illuminate the path for generations to come. Professor Syed Haroon Ahmed will be remembered not only as a pioneer in Pakistani psychiatry but as a man of conscience who dedicated his life to building a more humane and just society.