

The Legend of Dr. Kotnis: An Inspiration for Global Healthcare Cooperation.

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It was 1938 and China was in dire need of healthcare workers during the Sino Japanese war when Japan attacked China and China turned to India for help.

Dr. Dwarkanath Shantaram Kotnis was an Indian Doctor who volunteered to go to China as a part of a medical assistance team sent by India. He was born in Solapur District in the state of Maharashtra on 10th October 1910 and went to medical school at Seth GS Medical College in Mumbai and was preparing for Post-Graduation.

General Zhu De requested then Indian top leader, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru for assistance in terms of healthcare and an appeal was made across the country which excited a young Dr. Kotnis, who decided to apply despite his parents' wish for him to get married and settle down. His father approved of his decision while his mother was reluctant. His sister recalls that Dr. Kotnis decided to take on this challenge to explore the world and practice Medicine across the world.

Soon a five-doctor team was sent which included Dr. M. Attal, Dr. M. Cholkar, Dr. Debesh Mukherjee, Dr. B.K. Basu and Dr. Dwarkanath Kotnis. All of them returned except Dr. Kotnis, who decided to stay in China [1].

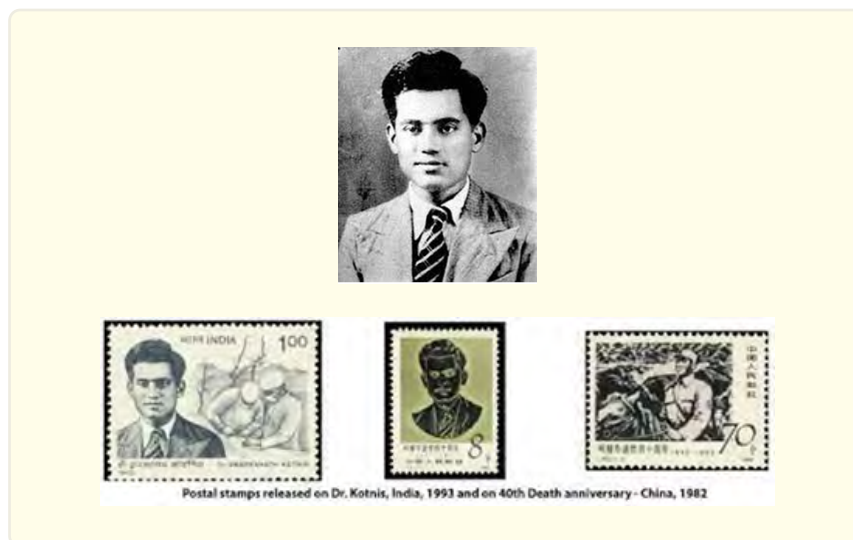
He adapted swiftly to the conditions and even learned Mandarin. He worked in mobile clinics and treated wounded Chinese soldiers. He worked with 'the eighth route army' led by future premier of China, Mao Zedong. He treated over 800 wounded Chinese soldiers, performing a record 585 surgeries in 13 days and even working non-stop for 72 hours without any sleep. He was honored by the Chinese authorities, when he was chosen as Director of Dr. Norman Bethune Peace Hospital, which was named after Dr. Norman Bethune, Canadian surgeon who had followed a similar path before Dr. Kotnis. He later got married to local Chinese nurse Guo Qinglan who was working in the same hospital. They had a son together named YinHua which are Chinese characters for India and China [1, 2].

He was even in the process of writing a textbook for doctors based on his experiences in war, however he could not complete it. He died of epileptic attacks secondary to neurocysticercosis at the young age of 32 on 9th December 1942 [2].

In the aftermath of his death tributes were paid to him by the likes of Mao Zedong and Sun-Yat-Sen. The south wing of Norman Bethune peace hospital was named after him, a statue was erected in a park in Shijiazhuang in China along with Dr. Norman Bethune. He was named among the top 10 foreign friends of china in the last 100 years. [3] The Indian and Chinese governments have issued stamps in his memory. In his hometown Solapur, the railway hospital is named after him and a statue has been erected at a memorial in his old residence. Legendary Indian filmmaker V. Shantaram directed and acted in the titular role in the film 'Dr. Kotnis ki Amar Kahani' (The legendary tale of Dr. Kotnis) released in 1946. The Chinese have always maintained contact with the family of Dr. Kotnis in India, even meeting them every time the premier or president visits India [4, 5].

The legend of Dr. Kotnis serves as an inspiration for humanity for the international cooperation amongst countries amidst the global pandemic that has been going on for nearly two years now. The vaccines are available for over a year now and yet there are parts of world which have little to no vaccination. There are newer variants being discovered every day and we have no idea how long will it last. Let us pray this all ends soon.

Dedicated to: All the healthcare workers and their families, all of whom have sacrificed enormously over the last 2 years.



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