Medical Philately (Medical Personalities on Stamps)

DR. DWARKANATH KOTNIS, Postal stamps released on Dr. Kotnis, India, 1993 and on 40th Death anniversary - CHINA, 1982

Dr. Kotnis Ki Amar Kahani

If one is asked about an Indian doctor who has worked abroad and brought maximum laurels to his country, the name of Dr. Dwarkanath Shantaram Kotnis will stand out prominently. It was not academic brilliance or some outstanding medical research but humanitarian work in a foreign land which made him immortal.

Dr. Kotnis, a young surgeon from Solapur (Maharashtra) gave up a bright career, joined a team of five Indian doctors who had volunteered to go to war-torn China on a humanitarian mission; responding to call given by Indian National Congress under Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru and Subhash Chander Bose in 1938. The Chinese received heavy casualties in this Sino-Japanese war. Dr. Kotnis worked hard almost 20 hours a day, serving the sick and wounded under primitive conditions in a foreign land. So moved was he by the plight of the Chinese after the war that he stayed on to serve them. Indian Doctors' team was joined by a trained Chinese nurse Guo Qinglan. Working together, Dr. Kotnis and this nurse fell in love and entered into a wedlock.

A mysterious infectious disease appeared on the scene affecting retreating Chinese soldiers. The young Indian doctor worked very hard looking after sick and trying to find a cure for the mysterious illness. The price he paid was contracting the disease himself. Overworked, exhausted and afflicted by disease, Dr. Kotnis died in December, 1942; leaving behind a nine month old son named “Yinhua” with two characters of his name representing India and China. The chinese held Dr. Kotnis in such a high esteem that his death was mourned by senior leaders of communist party of China including chairman Mao Zedong, Guo Qinglan heartbroken after demise of Dr. Kotnis, was forced to remarry in 1944 by party bosses. She is still alive and has visited India many a time.

His life has been immortalized on celluloid as “Dr. Kotnis Ki Amar Kahani” by the legendary filmmaker V. Shantaram in late nineteen forties. Dr. Kotnis continues to live in the hearts of Chinese decades after his death. His story reaffirms the fact that the doctors’ zeal to serve humanity is the paramount quality which society longs for; indeed a sobering thought for present day technology driven physicians. Indian postal department released the illustrated stamp to honour this illustrious son of India.

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