THE TRUE HAKIM: AN OBITUARY
FOR HAKIM MOHAMMED SAID
(1920–1998)

ANNA VANZAN

ON OCTOBER 17TH 1998, AT 6 A.M., Hakim Mohammed Said (Ḥakīm Mohammad Saīyd), while walking into his clinic at Arambagh, in Karachi, was assassinated. A tragic fate for a man who was essentially a philanthropist, who never avoided humanitarian duties. A visionary and an idealist, Hakim Mohammed Said had fought, among his other battles, to support yūnānī (Graeco-Arabic) medicine against all odds.

Hakim Mohammed Said was born in Delhi in 1920, from a family devoted to medicine: his father, Ḥakīm ʾAbdūl majīd (1883–1922) had started his career by opening a hospital in Delhi (1906) with the purpose of transforming it into the core of yūnānī renaissance. The name chosen for this project reveals the spirit with which it would operate: Hamdard, i.e., “to share the pain”, as if the ḥakīm was telling his patients “your pain is my pain”, accordingly to the deep and purest spirit of yūnānī tradition. The clinic was supported by a dawākhāna (pharmacy) that would manufacture relatively inexpensive drugs in the pure yūnānī tradition. Therefore, very soon Hamdard established itself as the place in which to seek for medical opinion, to be hospitalized and to find medicines.

At Ḥakīm ʾAbdūl Majīd’s death (1922) Hamdard was undertaken by the ḥakīm’s family, and in 1940 his youngest son, Hakim Mohammed Said, joined the enterprise. However, Hakim Mohammed Said had to remain only for a short while in India, as at the Partition (1947) he decided to move to Pakistan and establish a Hamdard branch over there.

The beginning was very tough: Pakistan was a poor country populated by people with no shelter, and Hakim Mohammed Said himself was without financial means and support. However, he had a great vision, that of building an institution with multiple aims, i.e., that to revitalize yūnānī medicine and promote it not only amongst the people of Pakistan, but also throughout the world. Naturally he also wanted to treat the sick and the
ailing by hospitalizing them in decent clinics, while, simultaneously, he strove in order to promote scientific activities and encouraging knowledge and education.

The clinics had to be financed by the drug laboratories, thus, following the Delhi examples, Hakim Said started the Hamdard Dawakhāna (1948), therefore giving new strength to the hospital project. The success of Karachi venture was such that the Hakim had to open branches through the country, and even to provide mobile dispensaries for patients living in Pakistan rural areas. Hamdard would treat poor patients for free, but nevertheless the business volume was such that in 1953 Hakim Mohammed Said decided to convert the enterprise into a waqf (charitable institution).

A man of culture and deeply interested in learning and teaching, Hakim Said institutionalized the teaching of yūnānī by opening a medical university in Karachi. However, he was not content with “just” his medical endeavor, therefore he instituted a “Madinat al-Hikmah” in Karachi, i.e., a comprehensive foundation which now carries out various educational, religious, cultural, social, academic activities ranging from the promotion and advancement of universal friendship (carried by its “Bait al-Aman” branch), to the support to scholarly research in various fields (a task entrusted to the institution called “Bait al-Ulema”).

In addition, Hakim Mohammed Said was an extremely prolific writer, as he wrote extensively and edited quite a number of scientific publications on ṭibb (medicine), not only on its pharmacological aspects, but also on its history, ethics and sociology. Also, he promoted Hamdard in a number of medical, religious, historical, literary publications. While journals such as Hamdard Medicus (in English) spread knowledge and information about yūnānī medicine, Hamdard Islamicus (also in English) treats more general topics related to Muslim civilization. In conformity to its broad range of interests, Hamdard also edits some publication expressly dedicated to children, as well as the Quarterly Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society, whose articles explore the history of Muslim in South Asia.

A visionary and an idealist, Hakim Mohammed Said had fought, among his other battles, to support yūnānī medicine even against key figures of Pakistani government, as it had happened during Moḥammad Ayub Xān’s presidency (1958–1969). At that time, Hakim Mohammed Said, who served as the Pakistani president’s physician, had vehemently protested against the attempt of the Federal Health Minister, General Wājid Burkī, to ban yūnānī medicine in favour of Western medicine. Therefore, he had mounted a victorious campaign in support of ṭibb and forced the Health Minister to withdraw the proposal.
However, we must add that there were (and still are) quite a number of denigrators of *yūnānī* medicine and, more general, of Islamic science, both in Pakistan⁠¹ and abroad,⁠² against whose defamatory accuses Hamdard has to defend itself. In spite of the enormous achievements of Hamdard in the subcontinent and abroad, and of the more general concern, at an international level, about the importance of the holistic approach used by the traditional systems of medicine (so much so that the many Western countries are forced to update their medical legislation in order to embrace old/new systems of medicine in order to regulate the increasing use of them), *ṭibb* is still fighting to affirm its dignity.

Though Hamdard’s essence is deeply based on the tenets of the Islamic faith, it recognizes that there is a need for rationalism and logic; as Hakim Mohammed puts it: “Although the Indo-Pak subcontinent, which is called the cradle of ethics and spiritualism has been deficient in rationalism, we have the duty of presenting the physicians of the world with a comprehensive program.”⁢³

Furthermore, Hakim Mohammed Said continues: ‘Our personal opinion is that religion shall always form an important part of human nature, and especially in countries like Pakistan, according to our opinion, there is no possibility of the disappearance of its influence. And even if this influence goes, human nature will find some other substitute for religion which will be only analogous to it”⁣⁴

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1. In Pakistan, for instance, the debate on the validity of *ṭibb* and Islamic science is always passionate. It is not by chance that the author of the book *Islam and Science. Religious Orthodoxy and the Battle for Rationality* (London: Zed Books, 1991), which harshly contexts the opportunity of an “Islamic science”, is a Pakistani scientist, Pervez Hoodbhoy. See also the provocative analysis of the state of the art of Pakistan science by Zia Mian, Senior Research Fellow at the Sustainable Development Policy Institute of Islamabad, “Islamic science, again?” in the daily *Dawn* (Karachi), 25 March 1995, 6. Nevertheless, one cannot deny there are still so-called *ḥakīms* who are unprepared and dishonest. See for instance Shahid Maqsood and Anusheh Hussan, “Sexual health services for adolescents at sex clinics in Rawalpindi, Pakistan”, http://www.who.int/reproductive-health/publications/towards_adulthood/25.pdf.

2. It is noteworthy that, in spite of Hakim Mohammed Said’s struggle for establishing a Traditional Medicine Program at World Health Organization and his generous endowment, the same office refused its financial cooperation for the organization of a meeting on “Traditional Medicine and Developing Countries” which had been programmed in Italy (November 1996) under Hamdard’s aegis. Letters of WHO’s deny are in my possess.


The founder of Hamdard Pakistan was well aware of the importance of ethics, and wrote extensively on this subject matter; among other crucial topics, he brought about the fact that “ethics is based on rationalism and logic, while religion is based on feelings.” As a result, it is clear that religion for Hamdard is a value with which a physician must be imbued, and it goes without saying that “religion” at Hamdard means “Islamic religion”. However, the Ethical Decalogue of Medicine formulated by Hakim Said does not contain a word referring to either Islam or the Muslim faith, but rather it stresses how “There is no alternative for Medicine except ‘Ethical Medicine’!”.

Hakim Mohammed Said was a great man, whose life, work and general behaviour are still a source of inspiration and imitation to everyone who wants to pursue the path of knowledge and humanitarian dedication. The continuously evolving activity into which Hamdard is engaged is perhaps Hakim Mohammed Said’s most tangible memento of his restless and successful utopia of building a new society.

5. This happened many years before the publication of the First Ethical Code of Muslim Medicine, produced by the First Conference on Islamic Medicine held in Kuwait in 1981.
6. Ibid.
7. Hakim Mohammed Said, “Ethical Basis of Medicine” (Appendix C), in Traditional Greco-Arabic, 80–85: 83. I would like to stress the fact that for a long time one of Pakistan Hamdard’s Trustees was represented by a Christian lady, namely Lily Anne D’Silva, who also functioned as Vice President of Madinat al-Hikmah, until she retired in the late 1990s. Besides, as a further proof of Hamdard Pakistan’s broadmindedness, it is to underline that its present President is Mrs Sadia Rashid, Hakim Mohammed Said’s only daughter, who also holds many important offices inside the institution.