



Prof Rashid Bhikha (1945-2023)

Pioneer, Visionary, Philanthropist and Laudium Veteran has returned to his Lord

It is with a heavy heart that our community bids farewell to a stalwart. Prof Rashid Bhikha, known fondly as Uncle Poppy, lived his life by example, through unwavering values, commitment to his family and society, and a quest for sincerity and humility that touched everyone who was fortunate enough to engage with him. His journey has been a purposeful and conscious stride in the betterment of South African healthcare services, education and training, his faith and his charitable efforts towards the improvement of the conditions of all people regardless of race, colour and creed.

Born on the 31st August 1945, Prof. Bhikha, like many influential South Africans of our time, grew up during the apartheid era, when injustice associated with the system was pervasive. He spent his life defying the odds, realizing dreams that were often deemed impossible through hard work, perseverance and unwavering belief in God's plan. Starting off as a qualified pharmacist in 1969, he founded the first black-owned pharmaceutical manufacturing company in 1974 and went on to build Be-Tabs Pharmaceuticals into the largest privately-owned generic manufacturer in South Africa. During his time at Be-Tabs he mentored many graduates who have gone on to make their own mark in the industry. He made strides in the Pharma-Industry that remain largely unparalleled for his time, and the visionary advancements he instituted in the South African environment are still recognized in medicine. In 2019, he was awarded a lifetime legacy award for his immense contribution to the South African Pharmaceutical Industry but he is remembered, more so for his respect towards every person he interacted with. In 2007, after 33 years under the Bhikha Family leadership, Be-Tabs Pharmaceuticals was sold to an internationally renowned company.

It was then, that he spent the remaining years of his life dedicated to the education and promotion of Unani-Tibb (Greek-Arab Medicine). Inspired by his personal experiences of this medical system, he founded the Ibn Sina Institute of Tibb, a non-profit organisation, for the promotion and training of Tibb in South Africa. Amongst the many training activities at the Institute, he initiated the recognition of Unani-Tibb with the Allied Health Professions Council of South Africa and worked tirelessly to analyse the theory and practice of this age-old system of healing. Prof. Bhikha initiated the training of Unani-Tibb at the School of Natural Medicine - University of Western Cape, created international forums of learning for Tibb and showed unwavering commitment to the empowerment of individuals to understand their temperament and in so doing, take charge of their own health. In 2005, aged sixty, he completed his PhD in Education that explored the integration of Unani-Tibb into the practice of medical doctors and clinical primary healthcare nurses. His quest for provision of medical systems that worked holistically with the body, earned him accolades from throughout the world, and he is recognized as one of the key philosophers of Unani-Tibb in modern times. His many research trials, papers, articles, books and textbooks have become an integral part of the Unani-Tibb philosophy, used and cited by scholars throughout the world.

Professor Bhikha's list of professional exploits is exceptional, to say the least. The considerable timeline that captures his life's work underpins the theory about him being a diligent polymath and altruistic health entrepreneur. Despite these many awards and recognition from professionals in the medical field, it is the many non-profit clinics and partnerships for healthcare that he instated which are testaments to his commitment to

people above all. He is remembered as a humanitarian, social justice proponent and empath for the improvement of the lives of the indigent.

This philosophy of striving to improve the condition of others, extended beyond healthcare to all facets of community. Prof. Bhikha supported many schools in his efforts towards educational upliftment. He is also known as a champion for displaced women and children in his efforts at the Saartjie Baartman Centre, in Surrey Estate, in the Western Cape. His extensive community endeavours earned him the prestigious Inyathelo Award in 2008, for a lifetime dedicated to Philanthropy.

Despite all his professional accomplishments, Prof. Bhikha is described by all who knew him, and even those who interacted with him briefly, as compassionate and kind with a humility above all else. He took the time to be with everyone he knew, particularly in their times of need, he listened with a unique ability that made others feel heard.

In Laudium, and in the Indian community at large, he was also hailed for his sporting prowess. His favourite words were, "Let's hit the ball!" A phrase that encapsulated his love for tennis, cricket and squash, which he played actively until his illness a year ago. In fact, his ability on the cricket field earned him many honors for his representation in leagues throughout his lifetime, and particularly for his contribution to the Pretoria team *District XI's*, where many will remember his **'166 not out'** score, to being chosen to play with Basil D'Oliviera amongst a dream team of non-white players during the Apartheid Struggle.

Prof. Bhikha remained a champion for freedom and inclusivity, so much so that he graced homes of friends and colleagues of all races, defying the Group Areas Act because humanity mattered to him above all else.

The love for all God's creatures extended to his personal interactions where he was known to say, *"there is no difference between a beggar and a king,"* and he lived by the example of service and respect for all. He was, in turn, loved by young and old in the community and beyond.

To him, his greatest blessing was undoubtedly his family. From cousins, nieces and nephews who viewed him as advisor and friend to his beloved wife, Mariam and four surviving children, fourteen grandchildren and four great-grandchildren, Prof. Bhikha is quoted to have said, *"I am deeply grateful to the Almighty for my faith, my wife and my children."* When asked in an interview in 2018, where he was profiled amongst South African Indian icons, how he wanted to be remembered he was committed in his resolve that he wanted society to remember him as an ordinary person who tried to always be humble, sincere, just and empathetic.

To the community and to his family, he epitomized these characteristics in a legacy that will leave its mark.