

Tribute

Late Professor Arif Siddiqui: Father of South Asian Association of Physiologists and a Beacon of Physiology from Asia



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Many people tread on this Earth... However, only a very few make a lasting imprint for the benefit of mankind.

I am privileged and honored to write these words of appreciation to commemorate the founder of the South Asian Association of Physiologists (SAAP), late Prof. Arif Siddiqui, for the inaugural issue of the SAAP Journal of Integrative Physiology (SJIP).

Prof. Arif Siddiqui was a former Executive Director of the National Institute of Health and Social Sciences, Vice Chancellor of Barrett Hodgson University, and a founder of the Pakistan Physiological Society. He was the incumbent President of SAAP at the time of his demise on 15th May, 2020.

Prof. Arif Siddiqui, born in Karachi, Pakistan, in 1948, obtained the BSc (Hons) in Biological Sciences in 1970 and MSc in male reproductive endocrinology from the University of Karachi in 1972. He also obtained an MPhil in reproductive physiology from Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad, in 1976 and a PhD in reproductive neuroendocrinology from the University of Glasgow, UK, in 1986.

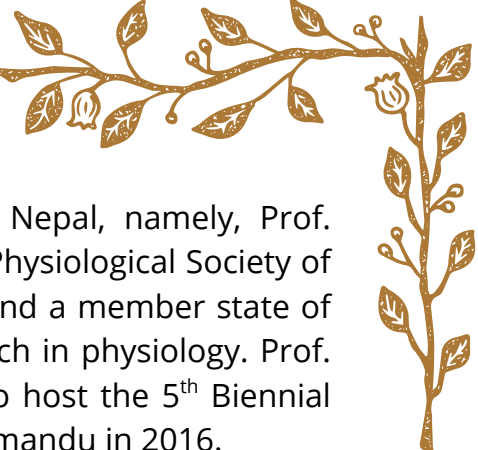
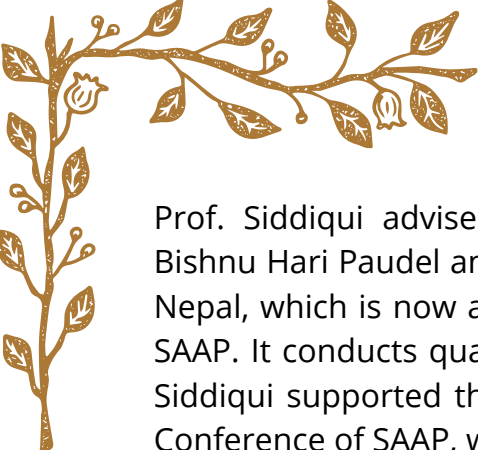
As a keen researcher with an interest in fostering the research environment in Pakistan, he sought to serve as an academic in physiology at the Aga Khan University, Karachi. He further extended his services to several other universities, including the Islamic International Medical College, affiliated with Riphah International University, Islamabad, Karolinska Institute, Stockholm, and St George's Hospital Medical School, University of London, UK. His organizational capabilities and leadership skills were well recognized as the Associate Dean at Riphah International University, Islamabad, for five years. The final appointment he held for four years until his demise was as Vice Chancellor at the Barrett Hodgson University, Karachi.





Prof. Arif Siddiqui
(1948-2020)

As a founder of the Pakistan Physiological Society, he motivated Pakistani physiologists to reach greater heights as academics and researchers. He motivated collaborative research and was keen to establish long-lasting academic bonds between member countries in the region.



Prof. Arif Siddiqui had a great vision of establishing SAAP, thereby generating an academic forum to unify all physiologists from South Asia. In order to achieve this goal, he first had informal discussions with senior physiologists of the region and established communication between these academics and the regional physiological societies. Along with the close contacts that were established, consensus was reached to establish SAAP in collaboration with the existing physiological societies in South Asia, including the Pakistan Physiological Society, the Physiological Society of India, the Physiological Society of Sri Lanka, and the Bangladesh Society of Physiologists. Physiologists from Nepal were invited to the inaugural SAAP Conference held in Islamabad, Pakistan, in 2008. Prof. Siddiqui worked tirelessly to host the 1st SAAP Conference in Islamabad. All credit goes to him for the formulation of the aims and objectives of SAAP, the constitution of SAAP and the 1st version of the by-laws in consensus with the member societies. At this conference, the 1st Executive Council of SAAP was appointed and the 1st SAAP Annual General Meeting was held very successfully due to the untiring efforts of Prof. Siddiqui and the conference organizing team. The commitment of the South Asian physiologists for the establishment of SAAP was affirmed by the participation of academics from all the member countries. Prof. Siddiqui worked tirelessly to achieve this collaboration and maintain harmony between the nations, despite the many geopolitical differences that existed between each of the nations.





Prof. Siddiqui advised the academics attending from Nepal, namely, Prof. Bishnu Hari Paudel and Prof. Rita Khadka to set up the Physiological Society of Nepal, which is now a fully recognized academic body and a member state of SAAP. It conducts quality academic activities and research in physiology. Prof. Siddiqui supported the Physiological Society of Nepal to host the 5th Biennial Conference of SAAP, which was successfully held in Kathmandu in 2016.





Subsequent to the 1st SAAP Conference held in 2008, SAAP conferences have been held biennially in Bangalore (2010), Colombo (2012), Dhaka (2014), Kathmandu (2016), Lahore (2018), and Colombo (2022). The 7th SAAP Conference was held virtually in India owing to pandemic restrictions in 2021. Prof. Siddiqui actively participated in organizing each of these conferences and was the main organizer of the preconference workshop on 'Teaching Physiology' at each biennial conference until his demise in 2020. He established contacts so that eminent physiologists attended the conference and workshops as resource persons. He was innovative to promote applications for sponsorship of the academic events and facilitate financial stability for the conference hosts.

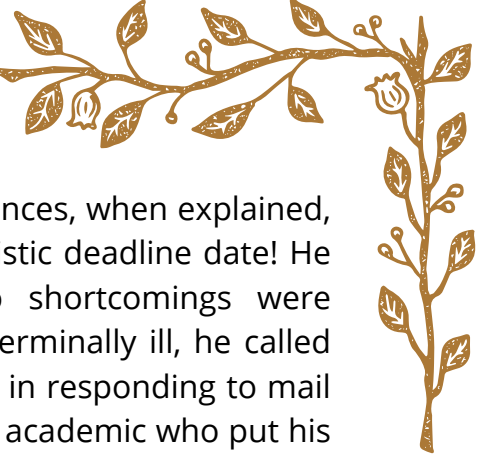
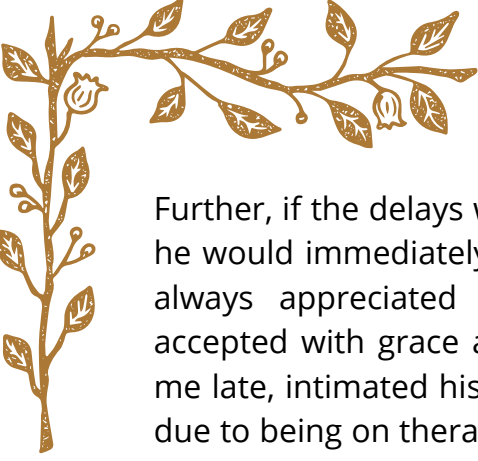


Internationally, he served on the education committee of the International Union of Physiological Sciences (IUPS) and was the trainee of many workshops on teaching physiology. He was the chairperson of the education committee of the Federation of Asian and Oceanian Physiological Societies (FAOPS) at the time of his demise. He believed in updating himself by attending the international conferences of IUPS and FAOPS regularly. He always took the opportunity to meet up with other SAAP delegates attending the conference, to interact, and maintain cordial links between the physiologists of the region. Apart from the biennial conferences, the quarterly SAAP Bulletin and SAAP website provide a platform to share teaching, research, and other advancements in physiology and to further maintain collaborations and connections within the region.





He served SAAP in many capacities as Secretary General from 2008-2010, 2010-2012, and was humble and unassuming not to take up the position of President until 2018, when the SAAP conference in Lahore, nominated Prof. Siddiqui as the President of SAAP from 2018 until his demise in 2020. I was privileged to serve as the Secretary General during this period. The meticulous organizational capacity, the need to respond immediately to e-mail and Skype phone calls were a part of Prof. Siddiqui's work ethic. He believed that all e-mail and correspondence should be promptly attended to. He would remind again if there was any delay on my part!







Further, if the delays were due to unavoidable circumstances, when explained, he would immediately understand and set another realistic deadline date! He always appreciated honesty, a valid explanation to shortcomings were accepted with grace and goodwill. Even when he was terminally ill, he called me late, intimated his illness, the fact that he may delay in responding to mail due to being on therapy. This was the high caliber of the academic who put his duties above all the other needs of life. His diligence at work and commitment to a strict work ethic, is an example to all.



Prof. Arif Siddiqui was an office bearer of several academic societies, nationally and internationally, and was honored with several research awards and accolades for his scientific contributions. He was an author of many peer-reviewed academic publications, inspired by multiple research pursuits. His academic contributions were recognized by a 'Lifetime Achievement Award' for distinguished services to teaching and research in South Asia at the 6th Biennial Conference of SAAP held at the University of Lahore in 2018.

Prof. Siddiqui was an avid sports enthusiast, especially cricket, played among regional nations like Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. He believed academic pursuits at foreign conferences should be accompanied by absorbing the cultural and historical importance of the nation. At the 1st SAAP Conference in Islamabad, he arranged for all delegates to travel to Murree and enjoy the scenic beauty of Pakistan. After the 2nd SAAP Conference in India, he toured the scenic countryside of Bangalore. In Sri Lanka, he attended the post-conference workshop at the University of Peradeniya, near the city of Kandy in the Central Province.

Prof. Arif Siddiqui passed away on 15th May 2020. A devoted husband and father, he is survived by his beloved wife, and two daughters, one of whom is a doctor. In memory of Prof. Siddiqui, the family has kindly granted two awards to SAAP. These include the 'Prof. Arif Siddiqui Young Investigator Award' to a young physiologist and 'Prof. Arif Siddiqui Memorial Oration' to a senior physiologist. These will be awarded biennially, commencing with the coming SAAP conference in 2026.



The launch of a SAAP journal was the brainchild of Prof. Arif Siddiqui. The SAAP Journal of Integrative Physiology is the realization of a dream he had for his fellow physiologists, whom he led with wisdom, and loved and cared with all his heart. Under the distinguished Editor-in-Chief, Dr. Kaushik Bharati, and the editorial team, may the journal strive forward from strength-to-strength, lighting the academic dreams of the present and future physiologists in the region and beyond.

