

## I WAS ALWAYS INSPIRED TO CREATE AN INSTITUTION IN THE AUGMENTATION AND PROLIFERATION OF PSYCHOTHERAPY

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*In Conversation With*

**Dr. Sheba Singh (Khumar)**

- **Founder & Psychologist**
- **TalkSpace – A Mental Health Studio**
- **Mumbai, India.**

**SIMPLY YOU**  
by Gurbeer Singh Chawla



Our readers would like to know about your educational background, qualifications and consequent achievements?

After graduating in Psychology, I won the University Medal (Gold Medal) in MA Psychology and pursued PhD in Psychology. I was always interested in research with youngsters and so my Doctorate topic was Exploring pre-marital expectations and apprehensions of young boys and girls.

After formal education, I taught post-graduate students in various colleges and at University before joining Govt in Public Policy. After a few years of on-ground effective policy administration, I moved as a full-time Psychology Practitioner.

I still stay engaged with academia being a Subject-matter expert on panels with colleges.

You are the Founder and director of "Talk Space-A Mental Health Studio". what is your vision behind this, and what challenges do you face while establishing mental health studio?

Having worked with Government in Public Policy and professing Psychology myself I was always inspired to create an institution in the augmentation and proliferation of Psychotherapy in the elevation of mental health. To realise this vision, it was imperative to create a platform that would nurture and contribute to quality and accessible mental health including inspiring and grooming young mental health practitioners in learning and experiencing through real case studies. Honestly, I always looked upon any of the challenges in creating this venture as an opportunity to consider and build on. Resilience is a core vector for an entrepreneur and having counselled, and in this



journey in-fact learnt from, many of my start-up founders (clients and their core teams in Employee Well-being Program.) I was mindful that I will hit bottlenecks/challenges all through and I have to overcome all being guided by my vision.

## What are the achievements of your professional career as a successful academician?

I was a curious student and that helped me earn a gold medal in my Post graduation in Psychology. Soon after, I got enrolled on the PhD program and authored many research papers. Simultaneously I started my teaching career at my Alma Mater (Punjabi University, Patiala). I got married to a banker and opted to support my husband in his professional journey and moved along with him to different places in the country, till we all settled down in Mumbai 17 years back. Well, this gave me immense exposure and opportunity to understand diverse and unique India which always helped me to connect easily with my clients from diverse cultures, ethos, and family practices.

All these years in Mumbai have been blissful for my academic career, as I was attached to colleges in Mumbai and specifically, SNDT University College as the Head of the Post Graduate Department of Clinical Psychology, till I switched to full-time practice. To continue my passion for teaching and academic work I train Psychology interns at TalkSpace, to be Psychologists. I am also attached with some colleges to examine their research projects every year.

## What were the reasons you chose Psychology as a career?

I was always influenced by my academician parents, both University Professors. My father, along with being a wonderful academician, was an outstanding Psychologist and an internationally renowned Urdu poet also. Conversations at home about the subject, challenges in its development and opportunities in the growth of mental health inspired me and my sister to pursue professionally in mental health. I am proud that my younger sister, Dr Deeba Khumar Chadha is a Licensed Mental Health Professional in Virginia, USA, doing her bit in mental health. We believe this is an apt tribute to our father, Dr Satnam Singh Khumar, who had dedicated all his professional life to practising/teaching psychology and treating people and also inspiring many young learners to pursue careers in Psychology.

## We see in our society most people ignore their mental health what is your experience?

There are many misconceptions about mental health. Most people believe that the emotional and behavioural irregularities in their life are situational and only if they are prolonged, does it concerns them and they reach out to a mental health professional. So many people still don't see a professional because of the stigma attached to mental health.

We are encouraging everyone through our structured communication programmes that it's perfectly okay to be mentally unwell, just like being physically unwell. Request everyone to not believe in charismas/magic and should you find it troubling, reach out to a mental health professional. Like any other health professional, mental health professionals would diagnose and treat the condition.

## What are the common symptoms of mental health issues to be diagnosed?

An increase/decrease in sleep or appetite is usually the first seen symptom in any mental health condition.



With Mother

Anxiousness and sadness are seen in most disorders as these are symptoms as well as full-fledged disorders in mental health. If the symptoms are persistent and continuous one should seek help from a mental health professional.

■ **In the present scenario all age groups are suffering from depression and anxiety. What are the basic reasons for this?**

According to the World Health Organisation, globally, the total number of people with depression was estimated to exceed 4.3% of the world's population. In India, the National Mental Health Survey 2015-16 revealed that one in 20 Indians suffers from depression. It is estimated that in 2012, India had over 258 000 suicides, with the age group of 15-49 years being most affected.

Reasons or risk factors for these conditions can range from biological to psychological to socio-economic to cultural. For example, anxiety and depression can be triggered by beliefs, natural disasters, loss of job, relationships, genes, or terminal illnesses.

■ **Can Mental health disorders be cured permanently by medicines and psychotherapy?**

Mental health disorders, like other physical disorders, may be partially or entirely reversible/curable. Mild mental health conditions require psychotherapy, and moderate to severe cases are treated with both, therapy and medicine. Treatment may take a month to a year depending on the severity and the response of the patient.

■ **In our society most women ignore their mental and physical health, what is your message for them?**

Ignorance is Not Bliss. For a strong nation, vibrant and energetic workplace or blissful home, it's imperative that women who shoulder many responsibilities are physically and mentally strong.



With Husband KD Singh



Memorable Pic With Family

▶ **How do you manage your professional work and family responsibilities together?**

My mother, my husband and my children are my biggest support system when it comes to balancing my personal and professional responsibilities. Also, I prioritize and schedule my activities every day according to my needs.

▶ **What are your priorities for social work?**

I am attached to NGOs and help women and children in need. I also try to do my bit by being considerate to some patients in dire need of mental well-being who may not financially afford the program. I have long-term programs on special fee packages for institutions looking to care for and elevate the mental well-being of their ecosystem – employees, partners etc.

▶ **Who inspired you the most in your life?**

My father has always inspired many people including me. His intellect and selfless helping behaviour toward people in need have had a deep impact on me. He has also influenced me professionally.

As I have mentioned earlier, my father was an academician (Psychology Professor), a practising

Psychologist and an Urdu poet. His treatment style was very friendly as well as professional, which made patients feel better in no time. I intend to inherit all his professional and personal qualities.

▶ **How do you define success in your life?**

Success, to me, is not one or a few milestones but is anytime I am able to make a meaningful difference in other's life. I am thankful to the Almighty and my parents for having me in the profession, where success can be achieved with every single life I touch.

▶ **You are always fit and energetic, what is the secret behind this?**

I practise what I preach.

▶ **How people can reach you for their mental health issues?**

I consult, by appointment (9987054000 Mobile), at my clinic at 217, Lake Primrose Commercial, Powai, Mumbai from 10 am – 8 pm. I also provide video/audio consultation. I can be contacted through my website [www.drshebasingh.com](http://www.drshebasingh.com) and through various social media handles (LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram).