

The History-Sheetter

Praise for the Book

‘[A] harrowing and infuriating account of a man determined to do the right thing, and the system that mercilessly continues to hound him.’

— **Anurag Kashyap, film-maker**

‘This will be a historical record, particularly for those who [will] study what this era asked of its citizens.’

— **Justice D. Hariparanthaman, retired judge,
Madras High Court**

‘*The History-Sheeteer* is a powerful memoir of courage, dignity and the human cost of injustice. It is a book that compels us to confront difficult questions about justice, citizenship and the moral purpose of our institutions.’

— **Prof. Manoj Kumar Jha, MP, Rajya Sabha**

‘In the fraught times in which we live, there is no substitute for raw courage. Dr Kafeel Khan’s story is an eye opener: how speaking truth to power can be easily criminalized.’

— **Rajdeep Sardesai, journalist**

‘[This is] the inspiring courage of Dr Kafeel Khan who did not hesitate to stand up for what’s right against [the] mighty, and stoically bore the consequences. A must read.’

— **Tushar Gandhi, author and rights activist**

The History-Sheetter

Dr Kafeel Khan

 juggernaut

JUGGERNAUT BOOKS
C-I-128, First Floor, Sangam Vihar, Near Holi Chowk,
New Delhi 110080, India

First published by Juggernaut Books 2026

Copyright © Kafeel Khan 2026

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

P-ISBN: 9789353452261 (hardback)

P-ISBN: 9789353458300 (paperback)

E-ISBN: 9789353455712

The views and opinions expressed in this book are the author's own.
The facts contained herein were reported to be true as on the date
of publication by the author to the publishers of the book, and the
publishers are not in any way liable for their accuracy or veracity.

This account is based on the author's personal memory.
Events described over six years ago and some details may be
subject to the limitation of human recollection. All efforts have
been made to be truthful and accurate.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
transmitted or stored in a retrieval system in any form or by any
means without the written permission of the publisher.

Typeset in Adobe Caslon Pro by R. Ajith Kumar, Noida

Printed at Thomson Press India Ltd

For Zab and Oli

By the time you are old enough to read and understand these words, you will already know that your Papa spent many years fighting battles he never expected to fight. I want you to know one thing above all else: Your Papa is not a criminal. He is a doctor.

One night, children were dying in a hospital. I tried to help. Some I could save. Some I could not. For speaking about what happened, I paid a price. But if I had to choose again, I would still do the same.

The years I was away from you were the hardest years of my life. I missed birthdays, Eids, first words and countless ordinary moments that can never come back.

I am sorry for that. But I am not sorry for doing what I believed was right.

Not because I was brave – I was afraid, many times. I did it because my heart told me to, and my *amaal* was clean.

Always remember: No Crying. No Complaints. No Comparison. No Cheating. No Fighting. Only love.

Whatever you become in life, be kind.

With all my love.



Before everything, Zab and I, asleep

Contents

<i>Selected Cast of Characters</i>	ix
<i>Timeline of Events</i>	xi
<i>Prologue</i>	xvii
1. Insiders Turned Outsiders	1
2. Airport Encounter	12
3. The Men in Dark Rooms	25
4. When Clothes Turn Edible	34
5. Return to Barrack Life	42
6. Links in the Chain	51
7. The Dance of Deception	59
8. Stamped as a Terrorist	68
9. Permission to Exist	76
10. My Wife, My Life, My Strength	84
11. Smoke Beyond the Walls	93
12. Doctor Turned Advocate	102
13. Locked Out of Sight	111
14. Prison in Pandemic Times	120
15. Landline and Lifeline	129
16. Delays and Distractions	136

17. The Paper Thrown	142
18. A Dam Burst and Release	150
19. Smuggled Across a Border	158
20. Family Conclave	162
21. Happy to Be Thus Counted	172
22. Committed to Truth in an Era of Lies	180
23. A Tsunami That Spared No One	188
24. <i>Jawan</i> : The Validation and the Vendetta	205
25. The India I Dream Of	218
<i>Epilogue: The History-Sheeteer Is Still Standing</i>	227
<i>Appendix 1: Public Order to Detain Dr Kafeel Khan under the NSA</i>	231
<i>Appendix 2: Open Letter by Dr Kafeel Khan Released by His Brother in July 2020</i>	232
<i>Appendix 3: Letter by Chair of the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI) to the Union Home Minister of India</i>	236
<i>Appendix 4: Allahabad High Court Judgment</i>	239
<i>Appendix 5: Letter Sent by Dr Kafeel Khan to Shah Rukh Khan After the Release of Jawan</i>	243
<i>Notes</i>	245
<i>A Note on the Author</i>	253

Selected Cast of Characters*

My Family

Adeel and Kashif: My brothers

Ahmar: My sister Farkhanda's husband

Farkhanda or Farro: My sister

Nuzhat Parveen: My mother

Shabista: My wife

Zab and Oli: My children

Ab: My nephew

The Government

Alok Kumar: Additional chief secretary of medical education in the Uttar Pradesh government

Himanshu Kumar: Inquiry officer and principal secretary to the Uttar Pradesh government's Food Safety and Drug Administration

Kulbhushan Singh: District magistrate, Aligarh

Yogi Adityanath: Chief minister of Uttar Pradesh

*Some individuals portrayed in this work have been given new names to preserve their anonymity.

The Prison

Amandeep: Co-prisoner

Charan Uncle: Co-prisoner and Amandeep's father

Kalia: Writer of the barrack

Matre: Jail superintendent

Pandey: Deputy jailor

Prakash Chacha: Co-prisoner

Rahman: Co-prisoner

Radhe Chacha: Co-prisoner and Jailor's lambardar

Rakshay: Jailor's writer

Shukla: Jailor

Vikrant: Co-prisoner

Ved Chacha: Co-prisoner

Other Characters

Advocates Indira Jaising, Fuzail Ayyubi, Ibad Mushtaq: My lawyers in the Supreme Court

Advocates Dilip Kumar Gupta, Nazrul Islam Zafri, Manish Mishra and Manoj Pandey: My lawyers in the Allahabad High Court

Dr Harjit Singh Bhatti: Former president of the Resident Doctors' Association, AIIMS, Delhi

Timeline of Events

2016

8 August: I join as a lecturer at Baba Raghav Das (B.R.D.) Medical College, Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh, India.

2017

10 August: Piped liquid medical oxygen runs out at B.R.D. Medical College's Nehru Hospital.

11 August: The Uttar Pradesh government posts on its official social media account that no deaths have occurred due to lack of oxygen at B.R.D.

13 August: Sixty-three infants and 18 adults die over the course of 54 hours after the oxygen shortage at the hospital.

22 August: B.R.D. Medical College suspends me from my post in the paediatrics department.

23 August: Uttar Pradesh's department of medical education files a first information report (FIR) against me and eight others under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) Sections 409, 308, 120(b), 420, the Prevention of Corruption Act, Section 8 of the IPC and Section 15 of the Indian Medical Council Act.

28 August: I file a plea for anticipatory bail in the Allahabad High Court.

2 September: The Uttar Pradesh Special Task Force arrests me and sends me to Gorakhpur Jail.

2018

10 April: The Indian Medical Association (IMA) comes out in my support, calling me a victim of conspiracy.

18 April: I write a 10-page letter detailing the events that transpired on the night of 10–11 August 2017 and ask for justice to be served in the Gorakhpur hospital tragedy case.

25 April: The High Court releases me on bail after eight months in prison, after clearing me of the charges of medical negligence and corruption.

19 May: I visit B.R.D. Medical College and hand over a letter requesting the authorities to reinstate me.

10 June: My younger brother Kashif is shot three times in Gorakhpur by unidentified assailants.

14 August: A Right to Information (RTI) response reveals that the hospital was facing a shortage of oxygen cylinders on the night of 10–11 August 2017. The B.R.D. administration's response states that around six cylinders were bought from other hospitals and I had arranged oxygen cylinders on my own.

22 September: The Uttar Pradesh police arrests me again, and I am sent back to Gorakhpur Jail for 'creating a ruckus and forcibly treating patients at the Bahraich district hospital and criticizing the policies of the Uttar Pradesh government'.

3 November: I am released from prison.

2019

7 March: The Allahabad High Court orders the Uttar Pradesh government to conclude their departmental inquiry against me within 90 days, acting on my writ petition to have my suspension revoked.

15 April: A probe panel led by Principal Secretary Himanshu Kumar submits its report, absolving me of charges of medical negligence, corruption and dereliction of duty, and acknowledges my efforts to control the crisis but finds me 'guilty' of private practice until 8 August 2016.

10 May: A division bench of the Supreme Court, comprising Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul and Justice Indira Banerjee, orders the inquiry regarding my suspension to be concluded in a timely manner and further directs the Uttar Pradesh government to pay the subsistence allowances due to me.

31 July: A second suspension order is passed against me for forcibly treating patients at the Bahraich district hospital and criticizing the policies of the Uttar Pradesh government while being in government service.

27 September: An internal inquiry committee of the hospital absolves me of the charges of medical negligence, corruption and dereliction of duty.

4 October: The Uttar Pradesh government orders a fresh departmental inquiry into my role in the death of infants on the intervening night of 10–11 August 2017.

12 December: I deliver a speech against the controversial Citizenship Amendment on the campus of Aligarh Muslim University (AMU).

13 December: An FIR is registered in Aligarh against me for alleged inflammatory speech under Sections 153(a) and 505 of the IPC.

2020

29 January: The Uttar Pradesh Special Task Force arrests me in Mumbai, stating that my speech disrupted communal harmony and was likely to create a negative law-and-order situation. I am sent to Mathura Jail.

10 February: The Aligarh District Court orders my bail.

13 February: The National Security Act (NSA) is invoked against me for my anti-CAA speech at AMU.

24 February: The Uttar Pradesh government orders a fresh inquiry, rejecting some points in the report submitted by the Himanshu Kumar-led committee.

1 September: The Allahabad High Court sets aside the Uttar Pradesh government's order holding me in preventive detention under the NSA.

17 December: The Supreme Court rejects the Uttar Pradesh government's plea to review the High Court order quashing the charges under the NSA against me.

2021

30 January: I am added to the list of history-sheeters by the Uttar Pradesh government.

3 July: I file a writ petition against my first suspension order.

29 July: The High Court questions the delay in ordering a fresh inquiry; it also asks the Uttar Pradesh government to justify why I am still suspended after four years.

6 August: The Uttar Pradesh government informs the High Court of its decision to withdraw the second inquiry and promises to complete disciplinary proceedings within three months.

27 August: The High Court quashes criminal proceedings against me for my speech at AMU in December 2019.

9 September: My second suspension in the Bahraich district hospital case is stayed by the High Court.

15 September: The High Court directs the Uttar Pradesh government to conclude its inquiry against me within a month.

9 November: The department of medical education of Uttar Pradesh terminates me from my post at B.R.D. Medical College.

2022

20 January: I file a writ petition in Lucknow branch of the Allahabad High Court against my termination.

3 February: The High Court issues a notice to the Uttar Pradesh government against my termination to file a counter-affidavit within four weeks.

2023

1 December: An FIR is registered in Lucknow for promotion of enmity and conspiracy against the Uttar Pradesh government

over my book under Sections 143, 420 (cheating), 467 (forgery to make or transfer any valuable security, or to receive money), 468 (forgery for cheating), 465 (forgery), 471 (using forged as genuine), 504 (insult to provoke breach of peace), 505 (statements causing mischief), 295 (defiling a place of worship to insult a religion), 295(a) (malicious acts to outrage religious feelings) and 153(b) (assertions prejudicial to national integration) of the IPC.

4 December: The High Court issues a notice to the Uttar Pradesh government against my termination, stating that if a counter-affidavit is not filed by the Uttar Pradesh government before the next date, then the court will proceed to hear and decide on my termination.

2024

29 January: The Investigating Office (IO), Lucknow, drops most of the charges and submits the affidavit to the High Court.

Prologue

Children calling to each other in excitement, their parents or minders raising an occasional shout of instruction or warning were all around me as I sat in the park where my son Oli was playing. His elder sister, Zab, had stayed back at home with her mother because a neighbour's daughter had come to visit her. I was keeping a watchful eye on the children, even as I noticed the darkening sky and the birds flying overhead heading back to wherever they belonged for the night.

Where was my home?

I had been living in a rented house just off a bustling highway in a neighbourhood with more factories than families for over a year in Jaipur, Rajasthan, a city with which I had no connection. The distance between Jaipur and my birthplace, Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh, was measured in kilometres. The distance between who I had been and what I was called became immeasurable. As the birds disappeared into the evening sky, my thoughts followed them – back to that house, back to the idea of home itself. I remember the first time I had attempted to leave it at the age of 16 and failed.

*

I had a school career in which I was firmly among the best students. I had been an attentive student under the strict

supervision of my father all through my childhood. But by the time I became an adolescent, it seemed cooler to pass the time in less dedicated ways, though social media was not that popular and there were no mobile phones to get you hooked on TikTok or YouTube. Instead, friends, music, girls, football and bikes became more important than studying. I was unmindful of my father's warnings to stay away from this friend or spend more time indoors than on the streets.

The result was inevitable.

I passed my Class XII examinations with average marks, a second division. When the results were printed in *Swatantra Chetna*, a local newspaper, I felt only dread.

How would I face my family? I knew how badly my father wanted my brother Adeel and me to become doctors.

I slipped into the house quietly. I avoided everyone except my sister Farkhanda (Farro), who swore to keep my secret. I told her I was leaving.

'I will work,' I said. 'I will study. I will come back only when I am a doctor.'

She tried to stop me. I didn't listen.

I left home with about 200 rupees.

At the railway station, a train stood at the platform. I bought a ticket without knowing where it went and climbed into the general compartment. As the crowd pushed and shoved, the weight of what I was abandoning finally hit me – not ambition or pride but loss. Loss of my parents. My siblings. Friends. Food. Games. Laughter. Shared pain. The neighbourhood I still believe was the best place in the world.

I wanted to cry aloud. Instead, I cried silently, surrounded by passengers of all shapes and sizes.

The train moved, and the platform began to slip away, with it, my life as I knew it.

With the sense of loss suffocating me, I closed my eyes tight, so I would not have to watch the disappearing station: Gorakhpur. And then the train shuddered to a halt, and my eyes flew open. It was still at the end of the platform, and I heard my father's voice calling loudly, 'Kafeel, Kafeel!'

Farro had alerted him. With the help of relatives in the Railways, my father and neighbours had reached the station in time.

I tried to duck under a berth at the sound of my father's voice, but it was only moments later that he climbed into the compartment. I emerged, shamefaced, and stood amidst strangers in the compartment. My father had bruises on his face and hands, I noticed. He said nothing, just swept me into a hug, then took me off the train.

We rode home on the old Lambretta he had driven recklessly trying to find me. I wanted him to shout and scold me so I could be relieved of some of the guilt I felt about my result and all the pain I had caused them. But no one shouted. Inside, calmer than he had been at the station, my father hugged me again with tears in his eyes.

'I do not want doctors or engineers. I want good human beings. You matter more than status.' That sentence stayed.

*

As I sat in the park, I realized that me being miles away from my hometown was not remarkable in itself, since moving away from the place one was born and grew up in is the inevitable destiny of millions of professionals. But I had not come this far from home out of any personal desire or ambition. On the contrary, I was here because the home itself had become a threat.

Reputation is an inheritance we rarely question until it is taken from us. Growing up in Gorakhpur, I took for granted my father's standing as an upright engineer in the irrigation department, and our family's reputation as long-established residents with deep local roots. It was not spoken of. It simply existed.

When I became a doctor and my brothers built successful businesses, that reputation seemed secure.



The Khan family, Eid, 2019. This photo was taken before I was sent to Mathura Jail, when my reputation simply existed.

Then came August 2017.

When 63 children and 18 adults died over 54 hours at B.R.D. Medical College's Nehru Hospital, there was national