

MINU BUDHIA AND KAMAL SHAH FILL HEARTS WITH HOPE AND GRATITUDE AT KOLKATA LITERARY MEET



Minu Budhia (center) and Kamal Shah in conversation with Shrutu Mohta

Stories of perseverance inspire people and instills hope. Minu Budhia and Kamal Shah's extraordinary stories added a high level of positive energy at Kolkata Literary Meet, in association with Victoria Memorial Hall and in partnership with **The Telegraph**. Their session, aptly titled 'Republic of Hope III — Against All Odds', moderated by Shrutu Mohta, spotlighted their journeys that were marked by adversities and their will to keep fighting for a better tomorrow.

Kicking off the session was the idea behind starting NephroPlus, India's largest network of dialysis centres that has changed scores of lives struggling with ailing kidneys, Shah said: "It all started with my blog, which I started writing in 2007. I recounted my journey of what could a dialysis patient do to live a normal life. There's a misconception that dialysis means end of life but nothing can be farther from the truth and I was a living example of that. I realised that patients and health care providers can give dialysis patients a life back. I wanted people to know how dialysis patients can take the

responsibility of care in their own hands and how they can do all things that a normal person can do."

Shah has been undergoing dialysis for the last 16 years and has had kidney as well as renal transplants in the past. The author of *Silver Lining: Overcoming Adversity to Build India's Largest Dialysis Provider* said: "There are a few things that we do at NephroPlus. The first one: We call our patients 'guest' as we believe that there's a negative connotation to the word 'patient'. Second, the quality of dialysis is extremely important and we have protocolised our dialysis. Apart from that we also organise a dialysis Olympiad that engages people in different kinds of sporting activities."

What connected Shah's story with the other speaker on the stage, Minu Budhia, was the drive to normalise what the society feels is not normal. Budhia, a psychotherapist and founder of Caring Minds who has been working extensively to normalise conversation on the topic of mental health, started off by talking about the stigmas surrounding the topic and how she took time to be herself. "Despite setting up Caring Minds when I

used to go to social parties and events I didn't feel quite right. I was not healed from the inside, I think I went too deep inside with my daughter and it took time to come out of that space. The more I was working with like-minded people and changing lives, the more I was getting healed. So the more I healed others, the more I got healed from inside. It took me four to five years to rediscover myself. This is finally me; this is the real Minu," said Budhia who recently received an honorary doctorate in mental health from Adamas University.

The next few minutes added a renewed sense of positivity in all with the speaker's attitude of gratitude coming to the fore. Urging all to not take their health for granted, Shah said: "When you get a life-changing diagnosis like kidney failure, it brings a lot of things into perspective, especially when you have setbacks. It was a very thin line and things could have gone the other way but I feel grateful. Even healthy people need to be aware that their health is completely in their hands. Life can turn in an instant. Please don't take your health for granted."

As the session drew to a

close, the audience was ready with their queries. Addressing the difficulties around Parkinson's disease a member in the audience was dealing with and the lack of empathy and awareness about the condition in society, Budhia said: "Adversity comes to everyone and nobody has the right to tell you to sit at home. You can carry out your work by taking proper care of yourself. Parkinson's is manageable with proper care just like blood pressure and diabetes and just like patients of blood pressure and sugar, you too can enjoy your normal life."

Shah urged her to read as much about her condition and talk to other patients for a deeper perspective. Another member of the audience brought the focus on the well-being of the caregiver. "Can you pour from an empty cup? No. So first you have to take care of yourself and love yourself. I also have a lot of stress but when I step into Caring Minds I forget everything. For caregivers going out and doing things that they like is therapy and medicine. Let people say whatever they want to," rounded off Budhia.

Farah Khatoon

Picture: B Halder