

Nasiruddin: Man of the Century

by Mohammad Amjad Hossain

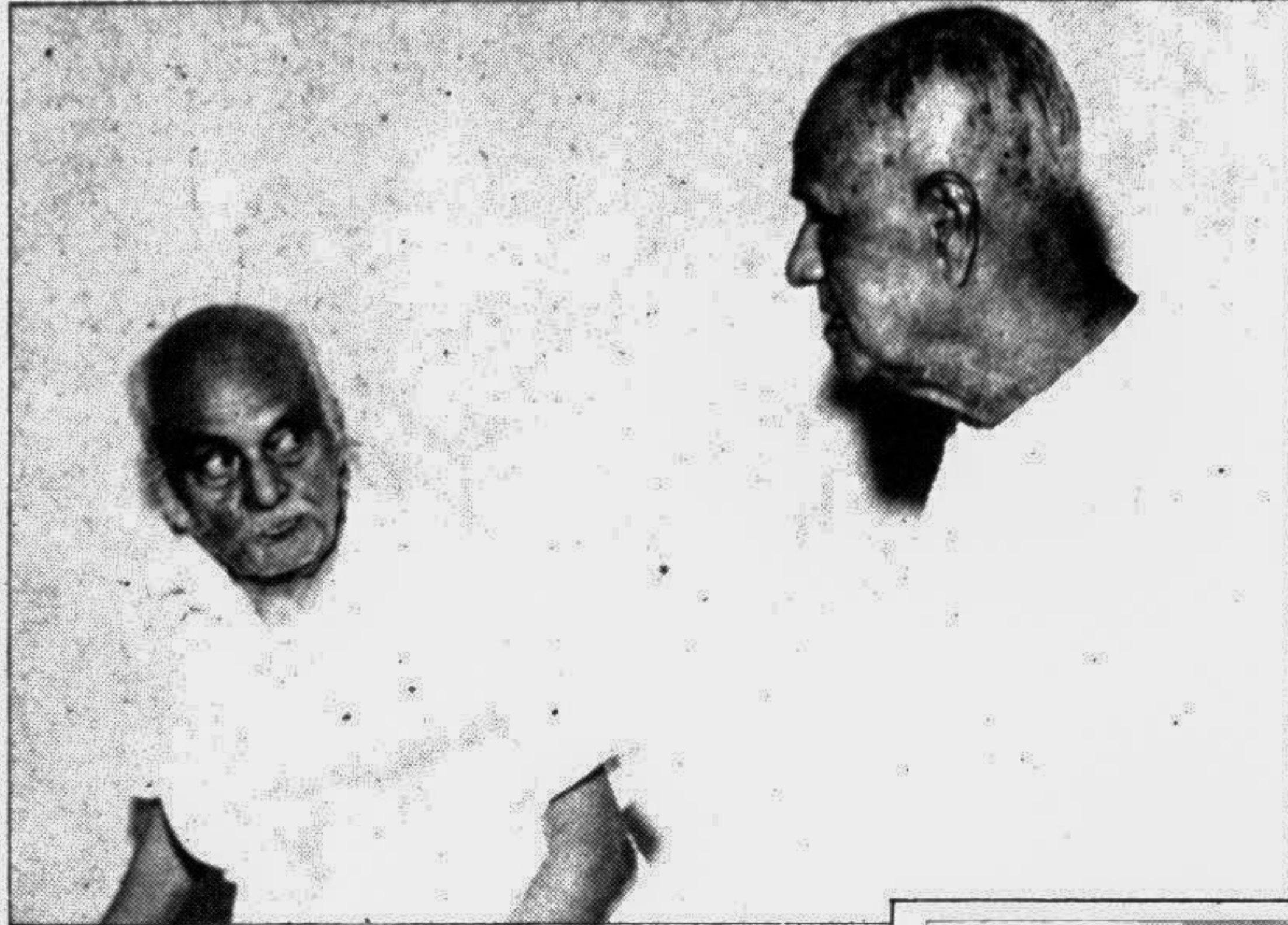
THE Shaoghat editor Mohammad Nasiruddin is no more to receive our honour and respect in person. Last we paid homage to the centenarian journalist and reformer on his 106 birthday, on 20 November 1993, at the auditorium of National Museum. I personally met him last at his Sarat Gupta Road (Narinda) residence on 7 April 1993 to extend an invitation in connection with the celebration of the birthday of his son-in-law Rukanuzzaman Khan, popularly known as Dada Bhai.

At 107 Mohammad Nasiruddin, who was a towering personality of the just passed Bengali century — a unifying force against communalism and an exponent of free thought and idea — was finally laid to rest on the auspicious day of Eid-ul-Azha, on 22 May 1994 at Shaheed Buddhijibi graveyard leaving behind an indelible mark in the literary horizon, and innumerable admirers.

He is survived by his wife Fatema Khatun, only daughter Begum Noorjahan, editor of the pioneer women's magazine the weekly Begum, grand and great grand daughters.

Born on 20 November 1888 at Paikardi village of Chandpur, Mohammad Nasiruddin incidentally began his career as an insurance man. But apparently moved by the plight of Muslim writers in British India he decided to bring out a weekly literary journal to provide a platform for the burgeoning writers, not Muslims alone, to blossom. And in a short course of time the Shaoghat appeared from his own printing press in Calcutta in 1918. Nasiruddin was hardly 30 when he launched this bold venture, and in a short span of time the publication turned to be a standard journal of the time where litterateurs like S. Wajed Ali, Principal Ibrahim Khan, Abul Mansur Ahmed, Mohammad Barkatullah, Poet Jastimuddin, Professor Abul Fazal and Sufia N. Hossain (Sufia Kamal) were contributing.

It was Shaoghat which carried first Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam's memoir of a Vagabond.



Mohammad Nasiruddin with Kazi Nazrul Islam in Dhaka.

a short story and a poem Samadhi (Grave) after six months of its publication. Among the galaxy of intellectuals so interweaved with Shaoghat were also Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, Kazi Motahar Hossain and others.

The Mission

Nasiruddin in fact began his mission with a missionary zeal to bring the neglected Muslim society in the limelight. And his Shaoghat played a very significant role in reawakening the Muslims of Bengal when the influence of Rabindranath Tagore and young writers of Kollol group was at its overriding height. Rabindranath Tagore himself wrote a letter to Nasiruddin congratulating him for bringing out such a standard journal. A poem under the caption 'Pather Sathi' (fellow traveller) by Rabindranath came out in the second issue of Shaoghat.

Shaoghat developed a style of its own to cater to the needs of all strata of the society particularly the backward Muslim community. Shaoghat carried

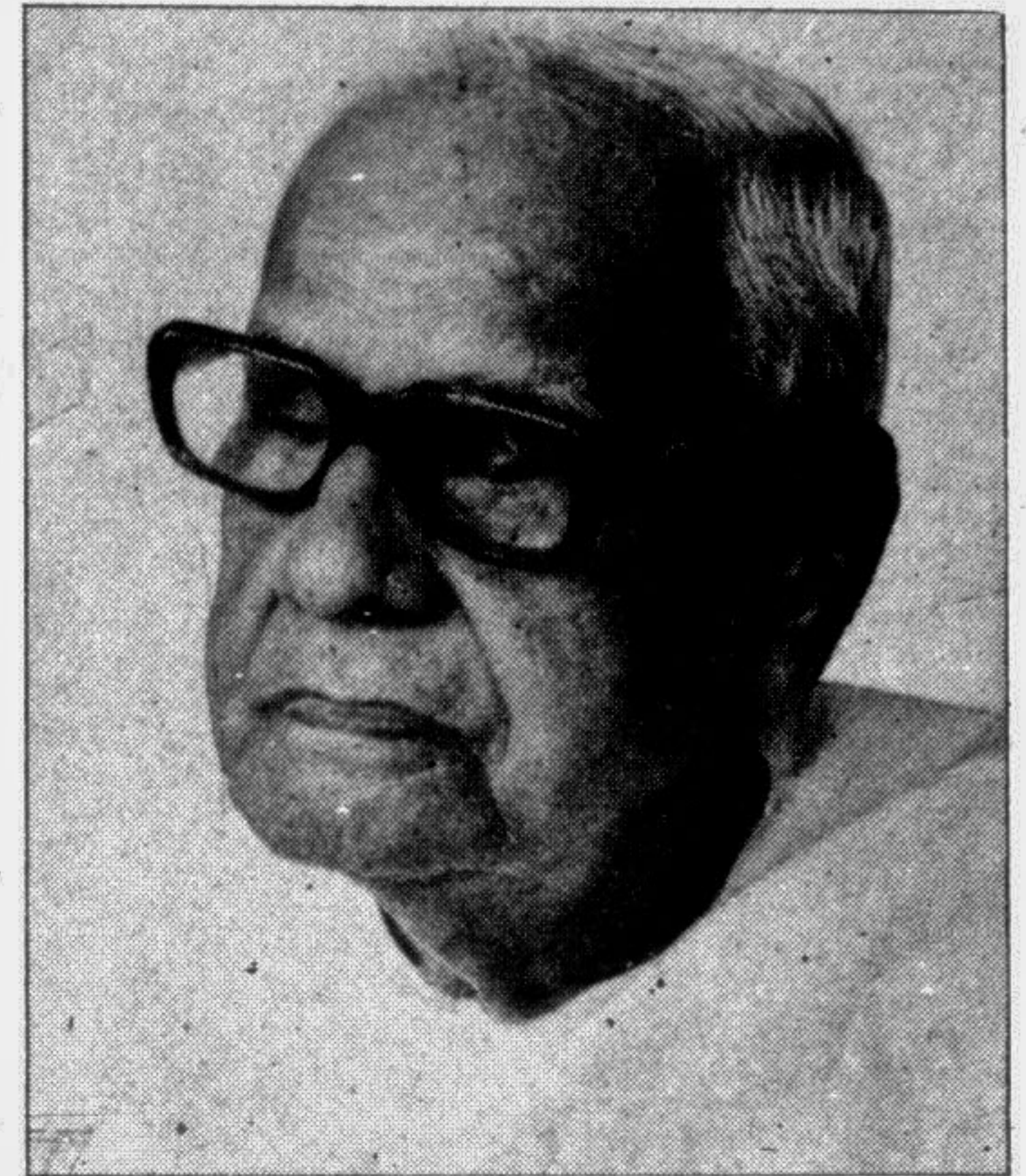
novels, short stories, poems as usual and also provided a forum for women. It had exclusive photo section which generally printed pictures of contemporary events and activities of womenfolk in the Muslim world. I was really amazed to see coloured pictures in the third issue (Kartik 1336) of Shaoghat. It was almost beyond comprehension to see coloured pictures in a journal, specially in this part of the world, 65 years back from now. It speaks of Nasiruddin's modern bend of mind. His editorial column focused attention on the oppression of the downtrodden people, illogical talks of the religious leaders and advocated for the development of women, spread of education and independence movement. These easily give the impression of the man who was conscious of the problems of the society and sought to address these in proper perspective. As an Editor, Nasiruddin combined the wide knowledge of the society with the power of communicating

that to the ordinary readers. And here lied his success. He never claimed to be a writer of repute himself but his contribution in making writers is unquestionably great. He also established Shaoghat Shaitya Mazlish (literary circle) in Calcutta — a forum for Muslim writers. It was on 15 December 1929 that a civic reception was sponsored for poet Kazi Nazrul Islam by Shaoghat Shaitya Mazlish. It was a success story for this literary organisation that despite various odds it could hold the grand reception in honour of the great poet under the chairmanship of renowned Scientist Prof. Fullah Chandra Roy where Netaji Subhash Chandra Basu, renowned writer and editor of 'Bharatbarsha's', Roy Bahadur Jaladhar Sen and litterateur S. Wajed Ali also spoke.

Kazi Nazrul Islam was closely associated with Nasiruddin until prolific pen suddenly stopped writing. At one stage of difficult period, Nazrul had to put up with Nasiruddin's Calcutta resi-

dence and worked together with him in Shaoghat. That Shaoghat became a popular literary journal in the 30's had also been reflected in the letters written by many of the subscribers when its publication became irregular. Shaoghat did not appear regularly in the middle of 1930 as its editor and publisher Mohammad Nasiruddin, suffered heart ailment because of tremendous pressure of work. In an appeal Nasiruddin apologised to the readers and sought their understanding and cooperation for continued publication of the journal. He was really bold enough to announce that Shaoghat would be published regularly by the 15th of each month containing minimum 150 pages and including one or two tricolour pictures and many other monochrome photos. From the eighth year of its publication Shaoghat appeared in larger volume containing more information on health, Muslim world, paintings, music, women's affairs, world affairs, cinema, besides the usual novels, short stories, articles and poems. He was of the view that there was no reason why publication of large size monthly literary journal

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Tribute to a Reformer

by Fakiha Huq

MOHAMMAD Nasiruddin, the eminent centenarian editor of the Shaoghat, passed away causing an irreparable loss in the sphere of women's literacy and liberation. The womenfolk of this region will be always indebted to this great veteran reformer. He tried his utmost to lift or diminish the social barrier of prejudices on the literacy and enlightenment of the Muslim women. Although he was not a teacher from any educational institution but by his encouragement and support he created a number of women writers, who ultimately inspired others to pursue literacy and knowledge. He showed the path and guided them. He realised that it was quite impossible to build up a prosperous society by suppressing or ignoring simply half of its members. And this feeling enabled him to sacrifice everything for the sake of establishing a press which would act as a spokesman for the women.

His father at the age of eighteen and at that tender age he had to bear the entire responsibility of his family. He took a humble job in a steamer at first. After some time, he got a comparatively lucrative job in an insurance company. He worked there for a while and became quite well-off. But neither his upbringing as a member of a conservative family nor the attributed insolvency due to his father's untimely death could arrest his longing for doing good to the womenfolk. He sacrificed his time and money to remove the social bondage of the Bengali Muslim women, encouraged them to express their mind and expose their dormant writing ability. And thus he nurtured the creative faculty of women. He ignored the frowning of society and boldly published pictorial monthly Sawgat, the weekly Sawgat, the Mohila Sawgat and the Shisu Sawgat. He established Sawgat Shahitya Parishad and last of all pub-

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Nasiruddin with members of his family on his 100th birth day. (Sitting from left) Son-in-law Rukanuzzaman Khan (Dadabhai), son-in-law, daughter Noorjahan Begum holding Gaurava, son of eldest grand daughter, wife Fatema Khatun, Mohammad Nasiruddin, eldest grand daughter Flora Nasreen Khan holding her daughter Muntia and Dr Fazlur Rahman Khan, husband of eldest grand daughter. Standing back row (left) Iftekher Ahmed, Husband of youngest grand daughter and Rina Yasmeen, youngest grand daughter holding her daughter Holmea.

50th Anniversary of D-Day OPERATION OVERLORD The Blueprint for the Allied Victory



French troops landing at Normandy

der, gave the go-ahead: June 6 would be D-Day.

D-Day

On the eve of June 6, 160,000 Allied soldiers waited impatiently to begin their mission: an assault on a 50-mile stretch of Normandy coast. Everyone knew the first 24 hours would be critical to the course of the war.

That evening, an armada of 5,000 vessels left England, and aircraft began taking off at seven-second intervals. Shortly after midnight, American airborne troops landed on the western flank, near Sainte-Mere-Eglise. Visibility was poor, and many paratroopers missed their drop zone: Some jumped out over the ocean and drowned; others were dropped so low their chutes failed to open. Gliders too had a rough time — many crashed into hedgerows, killing all aboard. Meanwhile, on the eastern flank, British paratroopers quickly took two bridges crossing the Orne River.

As the night went on, Allied aircraft and naval vessels

bombed the beaches while French Resistance fighters dynamited railways and severed telephone cables. As dawn broke over Normandy, the landing began: Men from the US First Army assaulted the westernmost beaches, code-named Omaha and Utah. To the east, soldiers from the British Second Army — consisting of British, Canadian and French troops — invaded Gold, Juno and Sword Beaches.

Omaha saw the bloodiest fighting. Several landing craft sank as did many crew-filled tanks specially designed to stay afloat. Soldiers struggled through neck-deep water in a hail of bullets, reaching the shore only to find their rifles and machine guns clogged with salt water and sand. For hours, they remained pinned down on the beach, unable to advance. Throughout the day, the outcome of the battle was in doubt.

The Omaha invasion was especially tough because a German division had moved into the area for training just a few days before. Allied intelli-

gence was aware of their presence, but it was too late to change the assault target. Yet in spite of heavy casualties, the Americans finally managed to take the cliffs overlooking the beach. By nightfall, they had pushed a mile inland.

The other landings went more smoothly. Utah Beach was taken with little opposition, and the British and Canadian troops (some with bicycles) overwhelmed their beaches and advanced three miles inland toward Caen.

The Battle of Normandy

After D-Day, the first objective was to link up the beachheads. This was accomplished by June 11, and the Allies then began to push inland. The enormous artificial ports ('Mulberries') towed to Arromanches and Omaha Beach were assembled and were soon operational, although a storm demolished the Omaha port a few days later.

From Utah Beach, US forces headed west, crossing the Cotentin peninsula and isolating the Germans defending Cher-

bourg. Turning north, the Americans then attacked the port city, capturing it by the end of June. Engineers at once began to repair the harbour — largely destroyed by the Germans — and completed the work within six weeks.

Meanwhile, the British and Canadians began their drive to Caen. The heavy bombing used to clear a passageway for the troops virtually leveled the city before its liberation on July 10. Once Caen was secured, the Allies turned their sights on Falaise.

On the Cotentin front, the Americans fought the bloody 'battle of the hedgerows' — it took almost three weeks and cost 40,000 casualties to gain about seven miles. On July 18, the Americans finally took Saint Lo. They were then positioned to launch Operation Cobra: On July 25, after a massive attack by strategic bombers, US troops penetrated German defenses, smashed the German left flank (west of Periers) and sped south to Avranches, reaching the town by the end of the month. General Patton's Third Army then quickly overran Brittany, save the ports of Brest and Lorient, which remained in German hands. Other elements of the Third Army hurried eastward, skirting the German Army to the north.

On August 7, Adolf Hitler launched the Mortain counterattack in the hope of splitting the American forces. But the strategy served only to put his neck in a noose. With Patton now coming up from the south and the Canadians moving down from the north, the Germans were ensnared in the Allies' 'Falaise pocket', which closed — albeit much too late — at Chambois on August 19. Most of the two German field armies in Normandy — some 250,000 men — managed to escape, despite heavy casualties and considerable loss of equipment.

On August 19, Patton's men crossed the Seine downstream from Paris, and on August 25, Leclerc's Second French Armored Division liberated the French capital. Operation Overlord was over; the Allies had gained their 'lodgement area.' But instead of halting to prepare an attack on Germany, Eisenhower ordered a wholesale pursuit of the German forces fleeing across France to their homeland.

Courtesy: FRANCE Magazine

Places and Memories in Normandy

Some fifty years after the Normandy Landings, what remains of the enormous deployment of troops and material that it involved? Which places conjure up the most memories and are the most moving for those who lived through the landings? Which locations are the most meaningful for future generations? In a word, which places should one visit if one wants to still feel that a decisive part of world history was played out on these beaches?

by Wilma Levy

bagpipes of Lord Lovat's commandos.

From the Orne to the Vire

Whereas from Deauville to Dives-sur-Mer (another place famous for its preparations for a historical landing, William the Conqueror's this time, in 1066), the villages crossed are redolent of the pleasant seaside holidays of the late 19th century, the 514 departmental road is quite the opposite. It follows a series of open-air historical sites along the dunes, Oustreham, St Aubin and Courseulles are a series of links in the 'Atlantic Wall', which suddenly became a focus of attention one morning in June.

A few kilometres west of the Orne river, Arromanches remains one of the most impressive sites. From its museum of the landings and from the hills overlooking the town, the visitor will be able to fully take in the technical achieve-

ment of the Allies, the construction of the artificial harbour. Located near the beach, the museum faces the last remains of the nearly 8 kilometre-long mole, built in record time by sinking caissons of concrete and by scuttling old ships. In twelve days, the peaceful town became a real harbour which made it possible to land thousands of tonnes of munitions and material, before being seriously damaged by a storm.

After that, crossing through pastures and copses, you reach Sainte-Mere-Eglise. Unlike the museum in Arromanches, its museum of airborne troops is more concerned with men than with materials. Through their equipment and yellowed photographs, one is more aware of the human dimension of the undertaking than anywhere else.

Sainte-Mere, naturally enough, is also a church. It is the one on which John Steele's parachute had caught.

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On 6th June 1944, the French fusiliers commandos of Kieffer attacked the blockhouses of Oustreham.