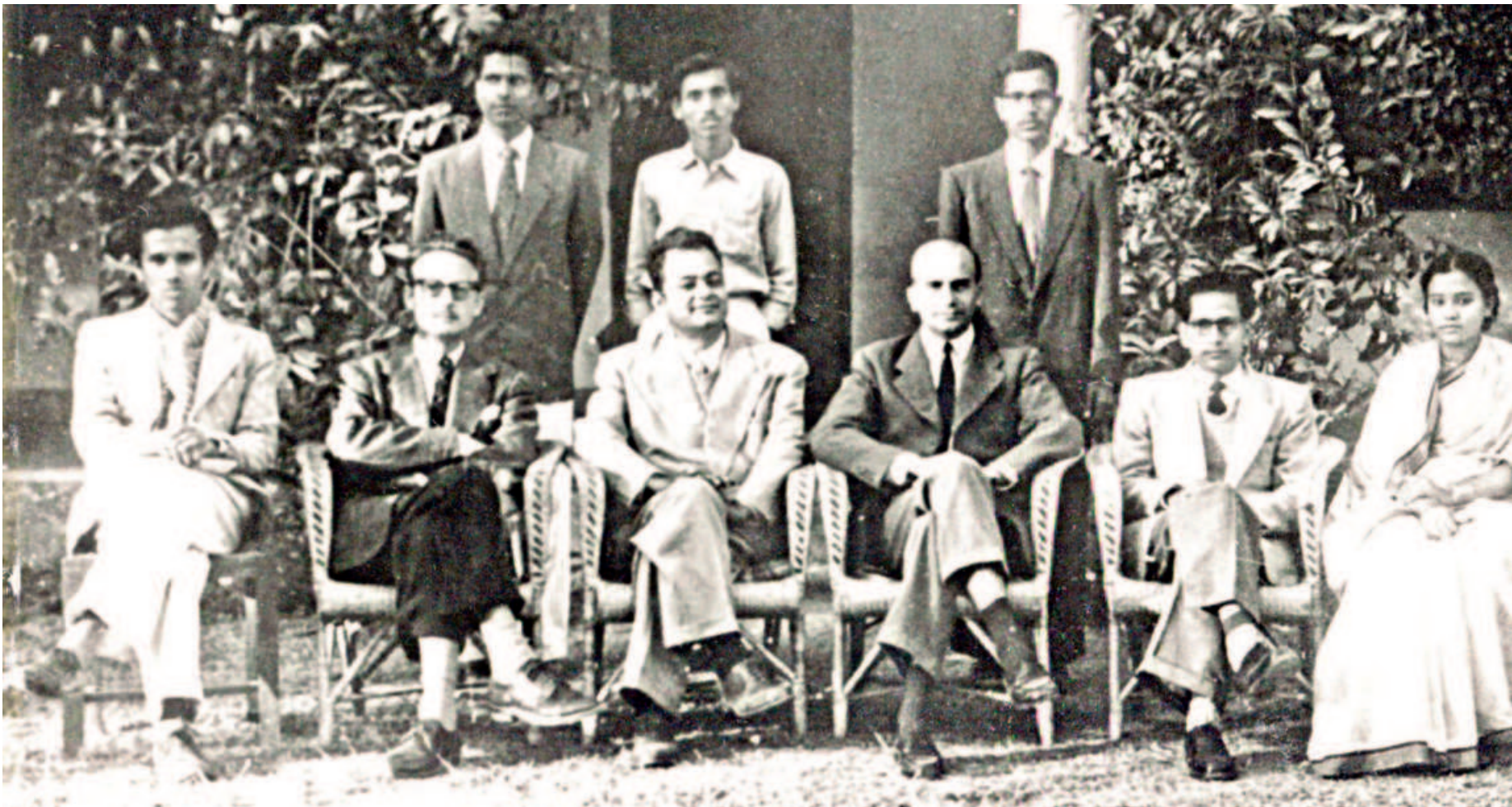


BIRTH CENTENARY OF A K NAZMUL KARIM



A K Nazmul Karim with his colleagues and Dr. Owen, UNESCO Professor, Dept of Sociology, 1960s

PHOTO COURTESY: LAMIA KARIM

In memory of my teacher

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A. I. MAHBUB UDDIN AHMED

It is, indeed, a great pleasure for me to avail myself the opportunity to say a few words on the occasion of the 100th birthday of the late Professor A. K. Nazmul Karim, who was my teacher, supervisor and colleague at the Department of Sociology, University of Dhaka since the mid-1960s. He taught me "Social Thought" and "Introduction to Sociology" at the undergraduate level during 1966-69 and "Theory of Social Change" at the Master's level during 1969-70.

Incidentally, he also took a course on "Theory of Social Change" with Professor Herbert Marcuse during 1952-53 at Columbia University, New York. However, in his course outline at the University of Dhaka, where he taught us the course, he did not introduce any strand of Marcuse or Frankfurt/Critical School. In that way, we missed a great opportunity to hear about Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* (1955) and *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) from one of Marcuse's students to whom we had easy access. Notwithstanding, Professor Karim's introduction to Freud's



A K Nazmul Karim in front of the new Dhaka University Building with his colleagues and students, mid-1960s

inadequacy. In the still of the summer noon, his voice sounded like a *Upanishadic rishi* in his colonial-style office, and I tried my utmost to grasp his advice and comments.

The only fond memory that I have is my autumn evening appointment at his Isa Khan Road residence for a discussion on my thesis. I was offered plenty of snacks and we had a long and fruitful discussion. Probably that was the only fearless simulacrum I could construct across time. His insights thrown on me in his characteristic manner on the social structure of Bengal were immensely beneficial in understanding my research problem. I was motivated to explore the colonial social structure of Bengal. Finally, I could locate Vivekananda sociologically; he wrote the autobiography of his own age.

As a stroke of luck, I became Professor Karim's colleague at the Department in early 1973, after a year of post-liberation transitional teaching in a college in Dhaka. He routinised a weekly seminar presentation

University Annual, 1946). By that time, I finished reading R. M. MacIver and P. Sorokin and could see a strong influence of them in his ideas. The radical thinking reflected in those articles never found its expression in his later work, *Changing Society in India and Pakistan: A Study in Social Change and Social Stratification* (1956) and *The Dynamics of Bangladesh Society* (1980), which were his Master's and PhD theses respectively. Thus, in *Changing Society*, Karim described the nascent development of "class consciousness" in colonial India and Independent Pakistan. Later, he shifted to "political consciousness" of purposive associations and political parties to assert that political parties are the democratic translation of class struggle.

The non-development of class consciousness in our society is never explained theoretically. For the Western society, György Lukács emphasised on 'commodity fetishism' and 'reification' in *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (1923) and Marcuse highlighted 'instrumental reason' in *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (1964). Similarly, in *The Dynamics*, Karim could continue his earlier radical tradition to show the relationships between class and elites as C. Wright Mills did in *The Power Elite* (1956).

His use of historical method in both works is extremely useful for the development of Bangladesh's social history, if not sociology. The utility of this method increases manifold and becomes sociologically essential, if combined with dialectics as in Theodor W. Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* (1966) and Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947).

Established in 1957 with the assistance of UNESCO, the Department of Sociology was colonized by neocolonial Pakistan — it was recommended by Claude Lévi-Strauss, UNESCO Commission Chief, first chaired by Pierre Bessaignet (1957-58), and taught by John Owen and Co Pot Land. The UNESCO assistance continued for a decade. Later, in neoliberal Bangladesh, to the utter disgust of its architect, the Department of Sociology has become completely NGOized in the general rubric of "commodification of knowledge" as asserted by Jean-François Lyotard. The failure of the Department of Sociology, University of Dhaka to decolonise pedagogy of the colonisers and bring about an epistemic shift in the form of European Enlightenment, is the fiasco of Bangladeshi sociologists to grasp the importance of historical method [dialectical added] for the study of sociological phenomena as emphasised by Professor Karim.

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Memories of my father

LAMIA KARIM

A child's memory of her parent is often difficult to narrate. There is no single narrative, no linear structure. There are so many stories, so many events that fold into each other. My father was a complex man. But of all his identities, my father's identity as a teacher was of paramount significance. He was foremost a teacher, then a husband, father, brother, friend. His interest lay in analyzing the dynamics of social change among the Muslims of Bengal and communicating to his students how to ask critical questions about social phenomena.

Daily, dozens of his students and colleagues would come to our house in the evenings to chat with him. Between the hours of 5 pm to 9 pm, the living room was out of bounds. Our doorbell rang consistently and streams of people would come to see him. This was the daily evening ritual in our house. From our bedroom, we could hear animated discussions in the living room. These were energetic discussions over cups of tea where debate and dissent were the rule. No one was expected to accept my father's viewpoint. He encouraged people to disagree with him and develop their arguments.

Sometimes in the evenings, my father would ask us if we wanted to go to New Market. My father loved to go to bookstores and check out the new books in stock. Our interest in going to New Market was to get new comic books and he would always let us buy one. In those days, they cost 1 rupee each. We would take a rickshaw from our Fuller Road University Quarters (we lived in building #32, flat F) and head to New Market. As soon as we got to the market, we would hear voices call out, "Sir." And that was it. And for the next 15 to 20 minutes my father would be engrossed in talking to his students or colleagues. I remember hopping from one leg to the other, bored to tears. Finally, when we caught his attention, he would move a few steps, when another voice would call out, "Sir." I remember my father being surrounded by his students. That was what he loved the most. He loved reading, writing, and sharing his knowledge with his students.

When we were children, my father said we must learn about all religions and respect people of all faiths. He would send us to see the pujas at Jagannath Hall. In our neighborhood, we were the only children who went to the pujas at Jagannath Hall. He took us to the Catholic Church in Kakrail. He even wrote to a Jewish friend in the US to write about their religion so his children (we) could learn about it. As a result, any form of religious bigotry was not allowed to grow in us. We were taught to see people as people. How one prayed was not an issue for us. As I look at the world where we are constantly killing or hating each other over one's faith, I realize the importance of my father's wisdom. He gave his daughters, we are three sisters, an immeasurable gift. I am extremely fortunate to have had this profound experience in my childhood.

Writing about my father in his memorial lecture series, Professor Rabindranath Guha of Kolkata wrote that he had met my father in 1941 when they were students of Political Science at Dhaka University. They both lived in Fazlul Huq Hall. British

A K Nazmul Karim (1922-1982)

rule was coming to an end and Muslims and Hindus were caught up in a frenzy of communal hatred and riots. Safety for both communities was a major issue. Most of the Hindu students had left the residential hall for areas that were more secure for them. Only 5-6 Hindu students were living in the hall. Professor Guha wrote how my father worked ceaselessly to build communal harmony between the Hindu and Muslim students. My father explained to the students that they were not each other's enemies, instead, it was the British that they had to struggle against. He tried to teach people to see the forest instead of the trees.

The riots that my father witnessed as a university student fundamentally transformed him. He became a humanist by witnessing the cruelty that friends and neighbors could inflict once they were taken up in the political maelstrom of the partition. In an unpublished essay that my father wrote at the end of his life in 1982, he spoke about witnessing an event that shook him at his core. The year was 1941, the air was thick with communal animosities between Muslims and Hindus all over the city. One day, he was in the hall with his classmates, when a few students came over to report that the clerk of one of the departments, Nabin Babu (a Hindu man) was attacked by some men who had cut open his abdomen. Nabin Babu was almost dead and was holding on to his intestines from coming out of his body. Some of the students went to see him. My father wrote, "Not only did I not go, but I also became very agitated and returned to my hostel room. Later at some point, I fell asleep. When I woke up, it felt like an age has passed." At the end of the essay, he wrote, "The times have changed, the questions have changed, but people have not changed. We need new answers for our new age." Many years after his death, when I read his last testament, I realized that my father's humanism came not from book learning but lived experience. And that is what made him who he was, a humanist in the true sense of the word.

Dr. Lamia Karim is the youngest daughter of Dr. Nazmul Karim. She is professor and head of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Oregon Eugene, USA.



A K Nazmul Karim with Shilpacharya Jainul Abedin

Professor Karim's introduction to Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930) in that course created a lasting impression on my nascent sociological imagination and I remained ever grateful to him for that.

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Odd enough, when I returned to the University of Dhaka in 1986 after obtaining my PhD from York University, I was asked to teach Professor Karim's favourite course "Theory of Social Change" in his mortal absence. I felt strange. As of today, I am still teaching this course and I am grateful to the Department of Sociology, University of Dhaka to allow me to teach this course for the last 36 years at a stretch.

I also found a strange tie on another count: both Professor Karim and I had one common thesis supervisor, T. B. Bottomore, the leading British sociologist at that time. We also had an almost common thesis topic. He supervised Professor Karim's PhD thesis, "The Modern Muslim Political Elite in Bengal" (1964) at the London School of Economics & Political Science. After more than a decade, Professor Bottomore supervised my Master's thesis, "Political Elite in Bangladesh" (1976) at Dalhousie University.

During 1969-70, I was researching Swami Vivekananda as my Master's thesis at the University of Dhaka under the supervision of Professor Karim. At that time, he was the Head of two Departments, Sociology and Political Science. I found my friends from Political Science unhappy about this.

It was never easy to enter into a "communicative action" (to borrow a phrase from Habermas) with Professor Karim: he appeared to us as an intellectual high priest and we felt dwarfed by his physical presence. This produced a general fear and anxiety coupled with a feeling of intellectual



In front of Columbia University with a friend while working towards his Masters Degree in Political Science and Sociology

in his office followed by tea for the young teachers for their skill development. When my presentation caught his attention and I received a few comforting words from him, my years of cumulative trepidation and agony suddenly left me. Then I began to prepare for higher studies and upon receiving Fellowship and Teaching Assistantship, left the University of Dhaka for Dalhousie University, Halifax. But I kept on communicating with him from Halifax and later, from Toronto. The news of his departed soul received in Toronto left me shocked. Myriad of images down the memory lane flashed and nostalgia gripped me. Cinematographically, I began to walk around the corridor of the Arts Building from where I began my journey to the world of learning.

My first impression of Professor Karim comes from his two articles, "Evolution of Religion and Marxism" (Aroni, Kolkata, 14 April 1944) and "Geography and God" (Dhaka