

oppression. In Nighat Said Khan, who had also joined the university for some time, she found a kindred spirit dedicated to changing the culture of female oppression. The pair was always to be found together.

The women whose lives Nigar had touched cannot forget her. Naveen Nayyar, who worked closely with Nigar in the *bastis*, recalls her awe at Nigar's determination, confidence, and demeanor: "I wanted to be everything that Nigar was—to dress like her, to speak like her, to be her. I learned from her why fighting for women's rights is so important." Hajra Ahmad reminisces about Nigar's brave spirit of defiance, good humor, and cheerfulness even in the face of adversity.

My story must stop here, incomplete and well short of the times when Nigar did the things she will be actually remembered for. In 1975, I left to do my Ph.D. and returned three years later. By this time Bhutto was being prepared for the noose, and his Pakistan People's Party goons who earlier on had been our adversaries were on the run. The dark clouds of dictatorship had begun to gather, ominous portents for the 11 terrible years ahead. The crackdown that soon came either crushed all political activities, or drove them underground.

By now Nigar had fallen in love with and married Tariq Siddiqi, a decent man high in the civil service. Tariq was politically and socially conservative, despised leftist politics and did not much like her socialist friends. But to her credit—and his easygoing nature—she managed to keep older friendships alive, even if things could no longer be as they once had been. This remarkable woman of courage, intelligence and warmth did much more than I can indicate, or even know of. Now it is for her other friends to continue this story. **nw**

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## Down by the River

Cambridge days and the summer of '68 with Nigar Ahmad

By Ahmed Rashid

**THERE WAS NO BRIGHTER** star in the intellectual firmament of Cambridge University in the late 1960s than Nigar Ahmad, who was studying economics and was a favorite of her professors. This was truer for the dozen or so coterie of Pakistani students attending Cambridge who adored Nigar as she automatically took on the leadership role of the community.

Pakistani students were poor—confined to spending just £50 a month on living expenses due to State Bank of Pakistan regulations. They were often confused and in doubt of which courses and subjects to take. They were also always hungry, fed up with the boiled British food and desperate for some *desi* fare and craved for news from home in an era when there was no Internet or Twitter or even email. News came in letters and the occasional telephone call.

Nigar always provided everything. She would loan you money when you ran out and the next month's allowance had not arrived, she would spend hours with you discussing your course materials and any other problems, she would invariably have *daal* or *keema* in her room ready for her ever hungry colleagues and she would always have news to share from her huge web of friends back home.

Nigar's most memorable contribution was the summer picnics she organized—often in a heartbeat. She would gather enough things to eat and drink and the small Pakistani community would assemble—either on the lawns of her college, New Hall, or on the meadows of the village of Grantchester, which overlooked the River Cam just outside Cambridge.

On a warm sunny day in spring or summer, there was no better way to while away the afternoon eating, chatting, and laughing with Nigar and fellow students. Invariably the talk turned to home, where there were tumultuous events happening: the fall of the government of President Ayub Khan, the martial law of Gen. Yahya Khan, the devastating tornado in East Pakistan that killed thousands of people and would lead to the eventual crackdown in Dacca, the war with India and the loss of half the country. Pakistan was still a country in the making and we were all determined to contribute to its betterment—no one more so than Nigar.

Those bucolic days by the river amid the flowers and the green lawns, the sound of birds and other students on the river in their punts sailing by was something that none of us ever forgot and that was largely due to the enormous and indomitable presence of Nigar.

She would go on to help start the women's movement in Pakistan, set up organizations that would improve the economic and social wellbeing of women, she would struggle against the state and obscurantism, and she would become one of the finest economists Pakistan has produced. All her life her tiny beautiful frame would always be bounding with energy and a desire to serve those around her. She will never be forgotten. **nw**

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