



The Unforgettable University Teacher:

**Prof. A. R. Momin**

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A brief chance meeting with Professor Momin last December (2019) in Bandra was disheartening! It was disheartening to see the man who walked tall, with very commanding persona deriving from wide scholarship, had become so vulnerable. He appeared very thin and frail, almost unrecognizable. This year came the sad news that he is no more. This is indeed a huge loss to the fraternity of sociology and anthropology and to the teaching community.

Professor Momin symbolized the community called University teachers. He embodied deep commitment to scholarship, a deep and serious engagement with ideas, conceptual categories

and theoretical perspectives. His lectures – he never carried any note cards with him during his lectures – exuded the confidence that emerged from very erudite scholarship; his command over the language he chose to articulate his ideas, the words he chose very carefully and aptly to express his thoughts, and effective intonation to communicate effectively was so very enticing that one would want to emulate him as a teacher/public speaker. One could not be relaxed during his lectures – he demanded strict indulgence with the ideas he was trying to propound.

His vast knowledge of theoretical sociology and anthropology was exemplary in anthropology and

sociology circles. From the classical traditions in these disciplines to the latest debates, poststructuralism and postmodernism, feminist perspectives in anthropology and the Black Atlantic of Paul Gilroy, he was well versed with the key works and debates. I distinctly remember he had suggested I read Steven Seidman's 'What is Wrong with Sociology'.

Professor Momin practiced and advanced the Interpretative paradigm in cultural anthropology, the hermeneutic tradition and phenomenological perspective in the discipline. He practiced and upheld syncretic tradition as a core of the idea of India. Of course, he was engaged with the larger question – the predicament of human beings.

I must point out that he was perturbed with the rightist forces occupying the centre not only in society but also in the knowledge production processes. For he favoured and practiced multiculturalism, diversity, academic freedom and a critical dialogue as the core of academic engagement. With his untimely demise, the academic community

has lost a scholarly, independent and critical voice.



Heartfelt Condolence!  
**Prof. A. R. Momin**  
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It was a real shock to receive the sad news on 25th of November in Germany that our dear friend Professor Momin has passed away!

Friends are some of the most important and precious persons we come across during our lifetime on earth! They are a gift to us. One such person was Prof. Momin for myself and my husband. Professor Momin was for us always a charismatic presence at the Department of Sociology. I remember the days when I was at the German Department. We had a very close association with the Sociology Department. When I had some problems or doubts regarding some university affairs or even otherwise I would just knock at Dr. Momin's door and walk in. He would receive you with a gentle smile on

his serene face! There was always an atmosphere of friendliness around him. We would chat for a while and I would feel relieved from the mundane administrative problems! The talk would then turn into an enlightening academic discourse!

I can hardly think of a meeting at the Department of Sociology without the presence of our friend Prof. Momin! Well, today we miss you, our dear friend! Yet we feel your Absent-Presence amongst us!

Professor Dr. A.R. Momin was an excellent scholar and an ideal teacher, a good orator, and above everything a wonderful human being! He had exceptional qualities of mind and heart. It is difficult to find intellectuals with head and

heart equally strong. Prof. Momin, we felt, was one such exceptional and genuine person. He had a remarkable openness of mind and a broad vision, a meditative, highly sensitive and benevolent spirit. He was a sahrudaya in the true sense. Prof. Momin was always ready to listen to different views and opinions without being judgemental. He was a real Sociologist and Anthropologist who could think globally and locally - with cultural roots and at the same time with universal vision of humanity. Momin was an exceptional scholar - his range of intellectual interests was so broad and vast - it included languages (he knew Persian, and even Arabic, I think), cultures, religions, Art, painting, poetry and music.

Besides or behind the highly academic and secular mindedness of his personality one could, if sensitive enough, feel a spiritual depth - the touch of Sufi spirituality. I felt often that Prof. Momin was an embodiment of the syncretic heritage, the composite culture of India! In some of our dialogues Prof. Momin would mention Sufi Saints and their sayings, as he knew that myself and my husband Prof. Findeis cherished Sufi verses. Momin loved

to recite them even in Persian and then translate.

Dear Friend Prof. Momin, now these are all memories... But we shall never forget those moments which touched our hearts deeply! Dear Elfrieda, we remember the beautiful moments we could spend with you and your loving children. We can feel how you would all miss him - Our heartfelt condolence to you, dear friends! We are with you in your grief!

Dear friend Momin, thank you for all your kindness to share all these treasures with us, thank you for the knowledge, for the rare wisdom and above everything for your friendship. We will miss you, dear friend. Once Prof. Momin sent us per email few lines of Sufi verses - I think it is by Rumi: Let me quote those lines to conclude:

"Goodbyes are only for those who love with their eyes.

Because for those who love with their heart and soul there is no such thing as separation!!"

It is true. Yet, we feel sad ... My husband Dr. Findeis and myself went for a walk on 25th November

evening after hearing the sad news.  
Suddenly we saw a beautiful sunset  
- red and yellow glow merging into  
the blue sky! On the other end of  
the sky nearby stood the half moon  
shining like a silent witness to the  
setting sun - leaving the hope for  
tomorrow's sunrise! There was a  
gentle breeze in the atmosphere...  
Suddenly we remembered those  
other Sufi lines from Sa'di which Prof.  
Momin had sent us once:

"As the soul goes forth, therefore,

never fear its departure,

for it will walk and touch still."

A Big Thank You, our dear Friend Prof.  
Momin!



Remembering  
**Professor A. R. Momin:**  
A gentleman scholar.  
***Indra Munshi***

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Professor A. R. Momin, Momin to his colleagues and friends, is sadly no longer with us. His passing away has left a void in the academic world. He combined good scholarship with high sense of duty and loyalty to the Department of Sociology, University of Mumbai, which he headed for many years. Momin was a respected and loved teacher, encouraging, mentoring, and helping his students in several practical ways, and all this in a quiet, serene and friendly manner but not without fun and laughter. He had a wonderful sense of humour!

Momin had completed his schooling in Bhiwandi, a small city in Maharashtra, well-known for its

textile industry, where his family lived. He joined St. Xavier's college for his Bachelor's degree which meant travelling for more than 3 hours everyday, and subsequently joined the department of sociology as a student in the MA course, pursued his Ph.D there, and was appointed as a lecturer in 1973. He then settled down in Mumbai. However, Bhiwandi where family and childhood friends were, occupied a very special place in his life; it was a bond he valued and nurtured till the end. Such was his commitment and loyalty to places and people.

He was not just a scholar of Anthropology, but also of Islamic studies, Sufism, Indian culture, to

which he contributed substantially. He was proficient in Urdu and wrote extensively on diverse subjects in that language. However, the theme closest to his heart was the syncretic culture of India, its plural and diverse character which reflects in every sphere of its existence. Momin promoted this vision of India, especially when it began to be threatened, energetically among scholars and lay people, in university and other platforms in India and abroad through his writings and lectures.

Momin did the Department of Sociology and University of Mumbai proud, he was an esteemed scholar whose unbiased, principled and mature opinion was taken seriously by the various prestigious academic committees of which he was a member. He was appreciated for his academic insights and knowledge and also for his friendly civility.

I will miss Momin very much, my colleague and friend of more than four decades, we shared many a happy hour talking, discussing and disagreeing, and just gentle teasing. However, my bond with Elfreeda Momin, his wife, a sociologist in her

own right, and his children, of whom he was so proud, will always remain.

In Memoriam:

**Prof. A. R. Momin**

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It was with shock and sadness that I heard about the passing of Professor Abdur-Rahman Momin last month.

Professor Momin was a teacher to the manner born. He was an M.A. and Ph.D. student of the Department, joined it as lecturer, became Head and spent his entire professional life here. He took his teaching seriously. For many, many batches of MA (Sociology) students at Mumbai University, his was their first introduction to social and cultural anthropology. His thorough grounding in the subject, lucidity of presentation and command over the language and vocabulary of the discipline left a lasting impression, as many students have acknowledged.

Professor Momin's oeuvre was vast, rich and underpinned with an approach of synthesizing. He combined in his research, insights from anthropological theory, a robust understanding of the intricacies of Indian diversity, an engagement with the scholarship on Islam and a commitment to the concept of syncretism. These multiple layers of research and analysis were delicately balanced with a deep-rooted personal faith. It made for a marvelous and authentic expression of syncretic scholarship.

Most importantly, Prof. Momin was a living link to the hoary lineage of the oldest Department of Sociology in the country. The Sociology Department

of Mumbai University celebrated its centenary last year. Generations of sociology students have been socialized into an awareness of its pioneering role and associated halo. Prof. G.S. Ghurye, considered to be one of the founders of the discipline in India, was its long-serving Head. Together with dedicated colleagues like K.M. Kapadia, J.V. Ferreira, A.R. Desai, D. Narain and others, he built it into a well-known and well-respected institution of national eminence.

Prof. A.R. Momin, generationally speaking, was younger than this group, but they had all been his teachers and mentors and later, colleagues too. They shared a common bond as members of a leading institution who were in the forefront of the field and saw themselves as having a mentoring role. He would frequently allude to the cooperation, collegiality, camaraderie and courtesy among faculty and students of that time; the approach of 'agreeing to disagree'. He carried that institutional memory through his stories, of course, but also in his own persona, conduct and approach which was above groupism, clannish cliques and

petty fights. He gave us, collectively, a sense of self, drawn from the Department's historical role but not limited or overwhelmed by it.

Personally, for me, he was a cherished mentor, always accessible, supportive and encouraging.

Prof. ARM, we will miss you so much.

