

In Memoriam



Parameswara Krishnan (1936 – 2021)

Parameswara Krishnan (Krishnan for short) was born in Kerala, India on November 20, 1936, the fourth son of Parameswara Iyer and Narayani Ammal. He passed away after a lengthy illness at his brother's residence in Trivandrum, Kerala on 17 February 2021 at the age of 84.

After completing his High School Education in H.S. Peringottukara, Trissur District, and Government Boy's High School in Chittur-Palghat, he joined the Kerala University affiliated Government College in Chittur-Palghat from where he graduated with first class honors in 1956 with a BSc degree in Mathematics. He was awarded the His Highness the Maharajah's Junior Scholarship for undergraduate studies. Shortly after his graduation in 1956, Krishnan joined the Statistical Laboratory (now the Department of Statistics) in the Research Institute at Thiruvanthapuram (Trivandrum) to complete his Masters in Theoretical and Applied Statistics, with a major in Theoretical and Applied Statistics. He graduated from this program with First Class standing.

Krishnan's first professional academic appointment was in Jaipur, Rajasthan. During his tenure at Jaipur, he worked on sampling designs and questionnaire construction as part of a large applied agricultural research program headed by Dr. R.N. Bagchi, a PhD from London School of Economics. His work also entailed conducting a number of social epidemiological surveys of the farming population. Dr. Bagchi inspired Krishnan to pursue theory driven mathematical applications and model building, an interest that captivated Paramaswara throughout his academic career.

In 1962, Parameswara joined the newly formed Department of Statistics at the University of Rajasthan. There, he taught courses in Pure and Applied Statistics and Econometrics, and developed a number of research projects on sampling methods, including new approaches to Rotation (Successive) Sampling using the Pareto Distribution that later paved the way for sequential sampling approach in large-scale surveys.

This early experience paved the groundwork for Krishnan's move to the United States to pursue advanced studies in statistics and demography at Cornell University. In 1967, he received a Ford Foundation Fellowship for three years to complete the Ph.D. He graduated in 1971 from Cornell with Demography as his Major and Mathematics and Statistics (Applied Probability) as his minors. His advisor was the late Professor Robert McGinnis, a leading mathematical sociologist. Professor McGinnis was a great inspiration and Krishnan was always grateful to Dr. McGinnis for instilling in him the desire to pursue research in mathematical modelling.

Having completed the Ph.D., Krishnan was highly recommended to a number of universities, including Hacatappe University in Turkey, the Australian National University, and the United Nations Statistics and Population Research Branch. The late Professor Kingsley Davis, then at Berkeley, had invited Krishnan to join him at Berkeley to help update his *magnum opus* on the Population of India and Pakistan. However, the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada offered Parameswara a permanent academic position; and in July 1971, he joined the late Professor Karol Krotki and others in the Department of Sociology to lead what would become a highly successful program in demography and population studies.

From 1972 to 1975, Krishnan served as the Director of the Population Research Laboratory (PRL) at the University of Alberta, a research centre started by the late Professor Warren

Kalbach in the early 1960s. Under his leadership, the PRL became an environment conducive to vigorous academic growth and development. The PRL's activities expanded to encompass population studies as well as survey research. The PRL began to organize Population Studies Seminars on a regular basis with student and faculty participation; and graduate students were encouraged to participate at Learned Societies meetings to present their research.

In 1974, Krishnan founded the *Canadian Studies Population*, for a number of years serving as its first editor. In the same year, with funding from National Health and Welfare Canada, he and Professor Karol Krotki conducted a large-scale fertility survey, the Growth of Alberta Families Study (GAF). The data from this survey provided faculty and students a significant source for research reports, articles, theses and dissertations.

In 1973, at the Population Association of America meetings in New Orleans, Krishnan proposed to colleagues the idea of forming an official Canadian demographic association. At a subsequent meeting with a small group of Canadian colleagues, which included the late Professor Ronald D'Costa from the University of Ottawa, Professor Eddie Ebanks from the University of Western Ontario, the late Dr. Kottai Gnanasekaran from Statistics Canada and several other from that institute, Interim Committees were established. The late colleagues Betty Macleod from Ontario Institute of Studies in Education, and Sylvia Wargon, Statistics Canada, with the assistance of a few others, were to work out the organizational details about a this professional association, the Canadian Population Society (CPS). In 1975, the first meeting of the CPS took place at the Learned Societies Conference in Edmonton in the context of the University of Alberta. As one of its founding fathers, Krishnan served on CPS Council from 1975 to 1977.

Krishnan's research interests intersect the fields of statistics, mathematical sociology and population studies. The cataloguing website, WorldCat identifies Parameswara Krishnan as contributor of 189 works in 362 publications encompassing conference papers and proceedings, Biographies, Census data, History, Vital Statistics, and Case studies. As editor, co-editor or sole author, he published eight volumes: *Mathematical Models of Sociology* (1977); *The Elderly Population in Developed and Developing World: Policies, Problems, and Perspectives* (1992); *Readings in Population Research: Policy, Methodology, and Perspectives*. *Festschrift in Honor of Ronald Freedman* (1992); *Methodology for*

Population Studies and Development (1993); *Differential Development and Demographic Dilemma* (1994); *Status and Identity in a Pluralistic Society: Essays in Honour of Gordon K. Hirabayashi* (1995); *Political Demography of India: Determinants and Consequences* (2005); and *Glimpses of Indian Historical Demography* (2010).

His research papers feature mathematical modeling of social demographic processes. Among his works in this research domain include, “Mortality modelling with order statistics”; “Lotka distribution for a finite mixture of human populations”; “Some generalized forms of the Pareto curve to approximate income distributions”; “On generalized Gompertz curves; and “A stochastic model of criminological transition”.

A large body of Krishnan’s work covers aspects of fertility, family demography and sociocultural processes, as indicated by the following few examples: “A generalization of Petersen's typology of migration”; “Linguistic dispersal in Canada”; “War and depression effects on Canadian marriage rates”; and A Comparative analysis of divorce rates in Canada and the United States.

Krishnan was also keenly interested in the demography of India. Some of his publications on India feature social demographic analyses of historical mortality declines, fertility differentials by religion; the historical demography of the Jews; and family and household structure among the nineteenth century Christians of Kerala. At the annual Population Association of America conferences, Krishnan often organized side meetings for scholars interested in pursuing research on the demography of this vast subcontinent.

Among his many professional involvements Professor Krishnan held visiting assignments at Peking University Population Studies Department; Demography Program at Australian National University; the University of Kerala as a Senior Shastri Fellow; S.V. University, Tirupati, India; and Centro des Estudios Demographicos in Mexico City.

To his students, Krishnan was a supportive and inspirational supervisor. He was calm and welcoming, which made those interacting with him comfortable. Most importantly, he inspired students to excel. He was a wellspring for new ideas, and routinely involved his students in his research, many of whom went on to

assume positions in academic and research institutes in Canada and abroad.

Toward his colleagues, Krishnan was supportive and generous, and contributed to the life of the Department in significant ways. Over the years, he organized a number of Festschriften and conferences to celebrate the careers of senior scholars, at the same time inviting junior colleagues to participate and contribute to these scholarly endeavors. Krishnan was also instrumental in the establishment of scholarships for undergraduate and graduate students.

Upon learning of his death, colleagues fondly shared their recollections of Krishnan. Harvey Krahn wrote that, “Krishnan was good at getting things started; Canadian Studies in Population was one example. Another was the Gordon Hirabayashi Endowment Fund. When I was Chair, Krishnan approached me with the idea of setting up the Endowment. Along with the idea was a cheque for several thousand dollars.”

Jim Creechan recalled, “Krishnan was always incredibly supportive of me and his smile was infectious. He and I were always amused when people confused our names and we received phone calls meant for the other person. Neither of us could understand how Creechan and Krishnan were confused for the other but it happened with regularity. The U of A was fortunate to have attracted a man so respected internationally”.

Susan McDaniel said Krishnan “was a good colleague during my U of A years. He and I were graduate students together at Cornell. I was a very young graduate student --- completed a Masters there --- and he returned to graduate studies after another career. He is missed.”

Admiration for Parameswara extends to his former students and colleagues beyond the University of Alberta. Rod Beaujot of Western University shared the following memory: “I profited from Professor Krishnan’s first years at the University of Alberta. Professor Krishnan was one of the lead proponents in establishing the Canadian Population Society. As Founding Editor of Canadian Studies in Population, Dr. Krishnan made a lasting contribution to Population Studies both in Canada and internationally.”

M. V. George, formerly with the Demographic Division at Statistics Canada, indicated that, “Krishnan was a brilliant demographer who contributed significantly to Canadian demography by his academic and research works, especially as the

founder editor of Canadian Studies in Population. My association with the Department of Sociology, University of Alberta started while he was Professor there with my appointment as Adjunct Professor. He was instrumental for it. I will be missing him but cherish his memory. May his soul rest in peace! ”

Shiva Halli of the University of Manitoba affectionately recalled, “Krishnan was one of the first few persons I met in Canada while I was a student.”

Ed Shihadeh of Louisiana State University, reminisced that Krishnan “was kind, approachable and very insightful --- everything that a mentor should be. He was a good man.” Ed also recounted an amusing incident that in some respects is reflective of Parameswara’s kindness, positive outlook on life and sense of harmony with nature. Ed had just completed the first draft of his Masters Thesis, and one day visited Krishnan at his residence, seeking his undivided attention and feedback: “At one point in the conversation, as I listened to [Krishnan’s] suggested revisions, I was ducking Pierre, his bird, which was flying around the house freely. I'm not sure Pierre liked my first draft!” (Pierre was always a feature at the Krishnan residence, never failing to command the attention of visitors!).

After a long teaching career as Professor of Sociology (Demography) at the University of Alberta, Krishnan retired from his official duties in 1998. A few years later, in 2001 he accepted a Visiting Position at the University of Botswana. Concurrently, he held the Ratan Tata Fellowship at Institute for Social and Demographic Change (ISEC), in Bangalore, where he conducted studies on socioeconomic problems and issues associated with Kerala's modernization and on the interrelationship of caste and politics in India. In 2005, he was appointment Professor of Population Studies at University of Botswana. In 2010, he returned to Kerala.

Besides leading a very busy academic life, Krishnan devoted himself to helping others in the community. In Edmonton, he organized the Kerala Bhajan Group and successfully promoted the teaching of Indian languages at the University of Alberta. He formed a scholarly group in South Asian Area Studies and Literature; and helped the Alberta Hindi Association gain permission to teach Hindi to South Asian Children on Saturdays at the University of Alberta. In recognition of his contribution to the promotion of Hindi Language and Literature, the Hindi

Association of Edmonton elected him Krishna as an honorary member.

In 1973, Krishnan married Leela Kurian, also from Kerala. Throughout their many years of marriage, Leela was a constant source of unwavering support and inspiration to Parameswara. She passed away in 2009, leaving a huge void in his life. They had no children. Krishnan and Leela spent their married life together serving their community. Both were kind, compassionate and generous, loved by all that knew them.

Parameswara Krishnan was a dedicated and productive scholar who made important contributions to demography, statistics, and sociology. We have lost an excellent demographer, erudite scholar, teacher par excellence and above all a fine human being. All his former colleagues and students are especially proud to have had the opportunity to learn and study with him and most of all to know Krishnan as a person.

We miss Parameswara, our colleague, friend and mentor.

In Kerala Krishnan is survived by his brother Seshadri and family; He is missed by his in-laws Rachel and Mathew and their relatives in Edmonton; and by several nieces and nephews stationed all over the world.

Frank Trovato,
Department of Sociology
University of Alberta, Canada

February 26, 2021