

REVIEW

DP's Legacy

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DP, as Professor Dhurjati Prasad Mukherji/ Mukhopadhyay (1894-1961) was known to his students, friends and admirers outside his home state Bengal, was a polymath in the Renaissance tradition. He had indeed taken all knowledge to be his province and hammered out a social philosophy of his own which he called *purushavaada*, translated in this *collection of essays as "Personalism".

Mukerji was, however, opposed to individualism of all sorts and elected to take a holistic view of human society. Although the range of his reading may at first sight appear somewhat eclectic, there was always a binding factor derived from Marxism (although he preferred to be known as a Marxologist rather than a Marxist). His preference for a variety of books inevitably reminds one of Khagenbabu, protagonist of his Bangla novel trilogy, whose reading too was as varied as the author's. Mukerji's book reviews in the Bangla journal *Parichay* in the 1930s and '40s similarly exhibit his width of interest.

All the eight essays translated by various hands in this slim volume were originally written in Bangla (Mukerji, like many other intellectuals of his generation, was equally prolific both in Bangla and English) and presumably published first in some journals in the 1950s. Afterwards they were collected in *Baktabya* (Statements) in 1957. The essays deserved to be made known to non-Bangla-knowing readers long before. Now that Srobona Munshi has edited the collection of essays the need is at long last fulfilled. In a long and well-written Introduction she provides an outline of Mukerji's life and works, highlighting his areas of activity, his lifelong interest in music, association with Rabindranath Tagore, Pramatha Chaudhuri, and Sudhindranath Datta that played a seminal role in shaping his mindset, his active involvement with contemporary Indian culture and politics, and, last but not least, his successful career as a university teacher of economics and sociology, first in Lucknow and then in Aligarh.

The book has been divided into two parts. Part One contains five essays grouped under the head "Reflections on Humanism", Part Two, three more essays embodying his view of history. Altogether they contain the matured contemplation of an ever alert mind endowed with rare erudition and wit.

Mukerji always had a viewpoint of his own and was critical of all cants. He could get into the heart of the matter and notice things that escaped the eyes of superficial observers. T N Madan, a former student of Mukerji, in the Foreword to this volume writes: 'The bane of intellectual creativity of India's public affairs, he used to tell us, had been Gandhiji's "inner voice" and the Left's "Party Line"! This is hitting the nail on the head! Ms Munshi observes that Mukerji's faith in man and his faith in history form the fundamental of his Weltanschauung. She says, paraphrasing Mukerji, that history reveals that man is unable to attain full humanity mainly because of class divisions.

Herein lies the relevance of Mukerji today. Even after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the people's democracies in Eastern Europe followed by the collapse of the erstwhile Soviet Union, Mukerji's declaration that belief is necessary for every kind of knowledge is very much heartening. He did not define class exactly along the Marxist line (ownership of the means of production and the relations of production in a given form of society). Yet he declared: 'Only someone who is perfectly aware of the future of scientific

production can venture to predict the future of classes. But from the point of view of logic, it can be said that if a sense of private property, monopoly over production and selfishness decrease, the field of conflict will narrow down and at the same time classes will become more extensive, spreading throughout society. The frightening intensity of class-conflicts will then diminish' (p. 95).

This again may not square with the Marxist approach but what is to be noticed is that Mukerji never discounted the role of conflict. He went on saying: 'Conflicts will persist in one form or another, for perhaps progress through obstacles and conflicts is the law of the universe. The end of all conflicts will signify the end of the world.' Mukerji does not develop the idea further in terms of antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions as Mao did, but this understanding of the dialectics of social progress is very much to be credited.

The publishers deserve kudos for bringing out this neatly produced volume. The glossary at the end is a useful addition. □□□

*REDEFINING HUMANISM : SELECTED ESSAYS of D P Mukerji

Edited by Srobona Munshi.

Tulika Books, New Delhi in association with Calcutta University, 2009, Pgs 109. Price : Rs 175.00