

Calcutta Notebook DRC

In the evening of December 10, 2010, the third 'Jayanta Bhusan Das Memorial Lecture', was delivered by Professor Pinakesh Sarkar of Jadavpur University in the Indumati Sabhagriha, Jadavpur. This is an annual event organised by the Jayanta Bhusan Das Memorial Committee on or close to Human Rights Day, to keep alive the memory of the life and work of Jayanta Bhusan Das.

Jayanta Bhusan Das, 'Joy-da' to successive generations of the young people who always seemed to surround him, was a resident of Chittaranjan Colony, Jadavpur, and one of the leaders of the struggle to establish the colony. For decades he was a key figure in the social, political and cultural (no mean singer himself), as well as the everyday practical life (a favourite arbiter of disputes) of the colony. He was himself a Displaced Person from the land now known as Bangladesh, the communal situation forcing his father to come over to India with his family. Jayanta faced the hard life of a refugee not in isolated self-seeking but as a part of the community in the colony and wider organisations like the United Central Refugee Council, UCRC, set up by the then undivided CPI and other left parties of the time. He married, but the couple were childless, their love for children expanding in time to include a much wider periphery. He took family responsibilities seriously, family for him always including his brother and his sister with her husband and children.

He worked finally at the Central Glass and Ceramic Research Institute. Here, too, his ability to organise people and his concern for rights found ample scope and he became the founder-secretary of the workers' and employees' union at CGCRI. He was a man much loved and respected at his workplace.

In all this work he was supported by the undivided CPI and he worked under its leadership. He was politically alive and took active part in the debates within the party. He joined the CPI(M) and later came closer to the Naxalite ideology with reservations, however, on many points of tactics and style of work. But he was a man of the broad left in his activity and won the respect of the local stalwarts of all left parties in his neighbourhood, and even of political elements opposed to the left. However, marked as he was as a leftist, during the Emergency he had to leave Jadavpur, a victim of the terror let loose by the followers of Mrs Gandhi.

He had a searching mind and, in his later years, was much worried regarding the about-turns in Russia and China.

He died in 2001, one of the numerous dedicated souls who, by their silent labour, built up the communist movement in the country - the salt of the earth.

The first JBD memorial lecture was delivered by Subhendu Dasgupta on November 11, 2008, entitled 'State Enterprise, Political Enterprise People's Enterprise : Interrelations and Their Absence'.

The second JBD memorial lecture was delivered by Dipanjan Rai Chaudhuri on December 10, 2009, entitled 'Some Problems Concerning the Establishment of a Workers' State in the Light of History'.

In his memorial lecture Pinakesh Sarkar brought out Rabindranath's empathy with marginalised people, marginalised not only economically, but socially on account of gender, caste, loneliness, misfortune. Fatik is an archetype of the kind, no living person on earth

caring for him as his fever rises and he finds no bottom to the deep darkness settling on him. Kadambini, whom everyone wants dead, and Chandara who chooses the hangman's noose, when her husband's love gives place to family solidarity, one after another character is immortalised for us, as we squirm uneasily, for it is we who have marginalised them. The characters were created long ago, but their relevance, unfortunately, still survives.

The memorial lectures for Jayanta Das deal with important issues of our time and deserve greater exposure. □