

A TRIBUTE
to



D.P. Chattopadhyaya
5 November 1931 to 13 February 2022

Paying homage to a great celebrity is always difficult especially if he is a multifaceted personality and a statesman. That is exactly what Professor D. P. Chattopadhyaya¹ was. He was a prominent academician and a scholar par excellence. He was also a politician to the core of his being. Quintessentially, he was a researcher and the founder of well-known research and academic organizations of different kinds. Over and above all these, he was an administrator with great vision. The depth and width of his circle of friendship can be seen by the extent of his scholarships and academic achievements.

From a very young age, Chattopadhyaya was a voracious and judicious reader and a brilliant student. Being born at Barisal (now in Bangladesh), his family migrated to Krishnagar in the Nadia district in West Bengal after patrician. His favourite subjects were philosophy, law and history. He had read the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, *The History of Greece* (Bury's) and *The History of Rome* (Momsen's) at a very early age. But the books he enjoyed the most were Sri Aurobindo's *Life Divine*, *Synthesis of Yoga* and *The Ideal of Human Unity*. He also

¹ I'm grateful to Dr Oinam Bhagat, Professor of Philosophy, JNU, New Delhi for sharing with me, a copy of the intellectual autobiography of Professor D. P. Chattopadhyaya.

read Karl Marx's books such as *German ideology*, *Communist Manifesto*, and the like.

Chattopadhyaya obtained his L. L. B., M.A., and D. Phil. (1962) from Calcutta University and also PRS. He went on to earn his second doctoral degree from the London School of Economics in 1963. He went on to join Jadavpur University as a faculty in 1964. Even though he was well-read in a wide variety of subjects, his major specializations and personal interests were always the various aspects of social and political philosophy.

Chattopadhyaya always believed that educated people should devote a part of their lives to serve the country by way of political activities, and expend efforts to improve the condition of the poor and the downtrodden. With these ideals in mind, he participated in students' union activities and politics. Thereafter, he started working for the Indian National Congress at the block-level and thereafter at the district level. As a result, he was nominated to the Rajya Sabha in 1969. The membership to the upper house of the parliament brought him very close to three former prime ministers: Mrs Indira Gandhi, Mr Rajiv Gandhi and Mr V.P. Singh, who was also his former colleague. He was also very close to several senior ministers and party bigwigs such as Mr Uma Shankar Dikshit, Mr. S.B. Chavan. Professor Nurul Hassan, Mr. Siddhartha Shankar Ray, Mr. Mohan Dharia. In 1971, Chattopadhyaya was appointed the Minister of State for Health and Family Planning. As a minister, he introduced in the parliament, a bill permitting the termination of unwanted pregnancies, and also changed the name of the ministry to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. Later on, he was offered the additional responsibility of the Ministry of Public works and Urban Development. He was a member of parliament for two terms. He was also a Member of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly (MLA) for one term (1987–89). He went on to become the Governor of Rajasthan from 1990-91.

On account of his excellent academic status and outstanding political

relations with senior ministers and high-ranking bureaucrats, he founded several research organizations and academic institutions, including the Indian Council of Philosophical Research, New Delhi (1981), a blessing which even Dr S. Radhakrishnan, the great philosopher of India in the recent past and former president, was not showered upon by the All-Mighty, the Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (1971-72), the Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, Calcutta (1972), the Centre for Social Sciences (a constituent unit of ICSSR), Calcutta and finally, the Centre for Studies in Civilization, New Delhi (1980-81) through all of which he published a very large number of volumes of scholarly books and erudite monographs on the development of science, technology, philosophy and other fields of civilization and culture of our country.

Some of his Indian academic friends who helped him in his efforts were (all professors) K. Satchidananda Murthy, Daya Krishna, G.C. Pande, S. Gopal, J.N. Mohanty, A. Rahman, Pranab Kumar Sen, Margaret Chatterjee, Debi Prasad Chattopadhyaya (Sr.), Sibajiban Bhattacharyya and several others. His overseas academic friends include (all professors) Karl Popper, John Watkins (both were his doctoral supervisors at LSD), Perter Strawson, Michael Oakeshott, H. D. Lewis, W.H. Walsh, W. V.

O. Quine, A. Danto, Hilary Putnam, Thomas Kuhn, Donald Davidson, Lester Embree, David Carr, Richard Rorty and several others. The fact that these eminent scholars and well-known philosophers accepted Chattopadhyaya into their company speaks volumes for his scholarship and high standards of publication.

Because of his distinguished scholarship and contributions to different domains of life, Benares Hindu University awarded him with the D.Litt. Degree (Honoris Causa). He also received the Fulbright Scholarship (1982), the UGC Research Scientist-ship (1987) and the ICPR National Fellowship (1992). The nation showered on him its highest appreciation by awarding him with the honour of the Padma Vibhushan in 2009. After the tenure of two terms in the parliament, Chattopadhyaya left active

politics to devote himself completely to his academic life and research activities. But the central government would not let him go free. He was appointed the Chairman of National Teachers' Commission (1983). Again, in 1987, he was appointed Chairman National Commission for Library and Information Systems.

Despite of his busy schedule as a politician and a minister, his hectic agenda as a teacher and an academic administrator, Chattopadhyaya was very much a private person. He never went out socializing, nor participated in club programmes or dinner parties, unless invited by the president or the prime minister. He meditated every morning for half an hour since 1948 and practised yoga without fail. He wished strongly for an authentic vision of God. When this intense personal desire was not fulfilled or materialized, he confessed that he was an atheist, and that he was spiritually disposed. He had a strict study routine from 8.00 p.m. to 2.00 a.m. during which hours, nobody could disturb him. He had great interest in Marx and Marxism, but was not a committed Marxist or communist.

His interest in contemporary Indian philosophy was confined to Sri Aurobindo and Tagore. He authored more than 12 books and wrote about 200 articles both philosophical and literary. He penned poems and books on aesthetics in Bengali (*Rupa, Rasa O Sundra*, which he wanted to revise and enlarge for the III edition but was unable to do so). He edited and co-edited several volumes, both for the ICPR and the Centre for Studies in Civilization. He edited the *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research* (JICPR) and *Sandhan* (Journal of Centre for Studies in Civilization) for several years, apart from editing several volumes, dealing with technology, philosophy, culture and civilization of our country.

As for his interests and contributions to phenomenology, while he was a doctoral student at LSE, he regularly attended J.N. Findley's lectures on

Cartesian Meditations. He extensively read Husserl, Heidegger and Sartre. His interest in Frege and his logic forced him to examine Husserl's Logic and the Frege-Husserl controversy on Psychologism. Heidegger's treatment of language and poetry was also close to his heart. Because of his interest in social philosophy, he studied Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. True, he did not write any book exclusively on phenomenology. But he wrote several articles on the same, and included many of them in his edited books and *JICPR*. The titles of many of his books carried phenomenological expressions. He followed the phenomenological method very closely in several of his writings. In 1988, he organized the international seminar on Phenomenology and Indian Philosophy in New Delhi, where 15 overseas scholars and an equal number of Indian scholars in Phenomenology participated. The papers presented were edited by him (among others) and was published by ICPR entitled *Phenomenology and Indian Philosophy*. We went on to edit another volume entitled *Phenomenology: East and West (Essays in Honour of J. N. Mohanty)* along with Frank Kirkland, published by Kluwer Academic Publishers. He also participated in the Husserl Circle Meeting at Denver, USA, in 1993. Despite all these, he would not call himself a phenomenologist, but claimed himself to be pro-phenomenological.

All in all, he was an extraordinary personality and a great soul. He has been taken away from us on 13 February 2022. He was an exemplar for every person with an academic bent of mind. May his soul rest in peace.

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