



PROFESSOR ASOK KUMAR MUKHOPADHYAY A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

In the year 1970, a young Indian aged around 30 years while entering India Office at London saw an Englishman standing at the entrance. He walked up to the Englishman and after a few necessary words remarked, "I think I have seen you somewhere. You seem to be known to me." The Englishman replied with a smile, "It is very much possible that you have seen me earlier. After all, I was India's last Viceroy." The anecdote of meeting with Lord Mountbatten was often humourously narrated by the legendary figure in Political Science, Asok Kumar Mukhopadhyay.

Professor Asok Kumar Mukhopadhyay (born: 07-12-1940, died: 18-08-2020), popularly known as AKM Sir among his students and colleagues was *Netaji Subhas Chair Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Calcutta*. He was also *Former Emeritus Fellow in Political Science, University Grants Commission, New Delhi* and also served as *Professor of Public Administration at the Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi*.

Graduating in 1960 from Presidency College, Calcutta, with first class Honours in Economics and Political Science, Professor Asok Kumar Mukhopadhyay passed his MA in Political Science from the University of Calcutta in 1962 with first class marks with special papers on Sociology and Social Anthropology. He did his Ph.D from London School of Economics and Political Science (London University) in the year 1972 on *The Politics of Water Supply—The Case of Victorian London*. His second Ph.D was from the University of Calcutta in the year 1973 on *The Panchayat Administration in West Bengal*.

Professor Mukhopadhyay did his Post Doctoral Research from: 1) Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi on *Municipal Government and Urban Development*, and, 2) National Institute of Urban Affairs, New Delhi on *Municipal Personnel Management*.

The learned Professor has a long, brilliant teaching experience spread over a period of four decades. He began his illustrious



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teaching career from Presidency College, Calcutta (1963-1970). He taught at two other Government Colleges (Taki Government College and Hooghly Mohsin College) between 1973 and 1979. In 1979, he joined *University of Calcutta* where he served till his retirement in 2005. In between he taught at the *Indian Institute of Public Administration*, New Delhi (1982-1984) on deputation.

He was former Editor of *The West Bengal Political Science Review* (Bi-annual Journal of The West Bengal Political Science Association) (1998-2003), and the former Editor of *The Calcutta Journal of Political Science* (Bi-annual Journal of the Department of Political Science, Calcutta University) (1989-1992; 1997-2005). He was a former member of the Executive Committee of *Indian Political Science Association* and former member of the Editorial Board of *The Indian Journal of Political Science* (for different terms in the 1970s and 1980s). He worked as the former President, *West Bengal Political Science Association*.

In 1996, *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES)* selected him as Senior Research Fellow, on a professional assignment in Germany for three months. It was immediately followed by another invitation for two months in 1996, where he worked as Academic Visitor to *Government Department, London School of Economics and Political Science, London University*.

He has published 15 books and over 100 research papers. He frequently contributed to leading national and international journals of Political Science and Public Administration as well as to standard periodicals and daily newspapers in English and Bengali.

He was a life member of *Indian Political Science Association; Indian Institute of Public Administration*, New Delhi and *Asiatic Society*, Calcutta. He was a former member of *International Political Science Association's Research Committee on Local Government and Politics*.

He delivered occasional lectures on invitation in many Universities in India and abroad. Some of these include Free University, Berlin (Germany); Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London (England); Dhaka University (Bangladesh), University of Madras, University of Mumbai, Banaras Hindu University; Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, Mizoram University, Aizawl, Sambalpur University, Orissa, Jadavpur University, Calcutta, Administrative Training Institute, Government of West Bengal, Calcutta.

He had a hobby of reading and writing. Serious and detailed reading of newspapers both English and Bengali was his habit and passion since childhood, which continued throughout his life. His good handwriting till the last day of his life deserves special mention.

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Recipient of Mahendra Nath Medal from the University of Calcutta, Asok Mukhopadhyay served on interview boards of *Staff Selection Commission (Government of India)*, *Eastern Region*; *West Bengal Public Service Commission*; Universities in and outside West Bengal.

Professor Asok Kumar Mukhopadhyay received Paul.H.Appleby Award from Indian Institute Of Public Administration, New Delhi on October 18, 2013 for rendering distinguished services to Indian Institute Of Public Administration, New Delhi and to the field of Public Administration.

A brilliant academic, gentleman par excellence and a powerful orator, Asok Kumar Mukhopadhyay, will be remembered for his simple style of living, benign nature and affectionate behaviour. His sudden, sad demise is a great loss to the fraternity of Political Science and Public Administration in India. His classroom lectures were unbiased, non-partisan, objective and open-minded.

Asok Kumar Mukhopadhyay has done substantive research in the fields of Urban and Rural Government and Politics in India and abroad. His research interests included *Public Administration, Comparative Politics, Political Thought, Political Theory, Political Philosophy and Political Sociology*. His admirable scholarship, witty sense of humour and serene smile would be deeply missed, even more so, at Union Public Service Commission, New Delhi, with which he shared a very close, warm relationship for the last three decades.

The esteemed professor often referred to two great minds, one from Ancient India and other from Medieval Europe. *Lord Buddha*, on his death



bed, advised his close disciple Ananda to seek necessary enlightenment from inner soul and one's own conscience while confronting any problem. The celebrated Italian poet and philosopher Dante in his long epic poem *Divine Comedy* observed that the darkest places in hell are reserved for those who maintain their neutrality in times of moral crisis.

He repeatedly emphasized that the roots of Indian culture are in the idea of plurality of views and choices. Any genuine democrat, whether in power or out of power, must have a moral commitment to preserve this plurality in order to be acceptable to the people.

Admiration and respect for his teachers were the hallmark of Asok Mukhopadhyay's illustrious career. Throughout his life, he held in high regard, the role of teachers who were instrumental in shaping his life and giving it a proper direction. Their guidance, advices and suggestions played a prominent role in various stages of his life and helped him reach the pinnacle of success. They include Upendranath Ghosal (*Political Science*), Nirmal Chandra Bhattacharyya (*Political Science*), Subimal Kumar Mukherjee (*Political Science*), Bhabatosh Dutta (*Economics*), Dhires Bhattacharyya (*Economics*), Dipak Banerjee (*Economics*), and, George Jones (*Political Science*).

Another noteworthy aspect of Asok Mukhopadhyay, almost unknown to many of his friends, colleagues and students, was his passion for English and Bengali novels, short stories and poetry. He was an ardent reader of Literature and had a varied collection of story books.

Great Expectations and *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens; *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Far From The Madding Crowd* by Thomas Hardy; *The Old Man and the Sea* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* by Ernest Hemingway; *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped* by Robert Louis Stevenson; *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe; *The Hunchback of Notre*



Dame by Victor Hugo; *Code Name God* by Mani Bhaumik; *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain were his all time favourites.

He greatly preferred detective and mystery novels like *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, detective stories written by Satyajit Ray, and, *Adventures of Byomkesh Bakshi* by Saradindu Bandyopadhyay. An ardent reader of Shakespearean dramas, like *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It*, *Tempest*, Asok Mukhopadhyay also had collection of short stories written by Ruskin Bond, R. K. Narayan, Anita Desai, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay and Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay.

The biographical note would be incomplete and imperfect without a reference to Asok Mukhopadhyay's lively and energetic interest in Sports. Probably, nobody knows that he was posted as Professor, Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi during the Ninth Asian Games held in New Delhi in November-December 1982 when Mrs. Indira Gandhi was the Prime Minister of India. He was a regular visitor to various Asian Games events like Badminton (Indraprastha Stadium), Swimming (Talkatora Stadium), Cycling (Yamuna Velodrome), Football (Ambedkar Stadium), Hockey (National Stadium) and Athletics (Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium) including the Opening and Closing ceremonies.

During his IIPA years (1982 to 1984), he often visited Ambedkar Stadium (Football), Feroze Shah Kotla (Cricket) and National Stadium (Hockey).

Since a long time, he had a keen interest in Asian Games, Olympic Games and Commonwealth Games, all of which are held every four years. The events of these Games, telecast live on television channels, kept him engaged and occupied throughout the 15-day period of these Games.

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The quadrennial events of World Cup Football and World Cup Cricket captivated him in no small measure and he was also an eager follower of Lawn Tennis Championships of *Australian Open, French Open, Wimbledon* and *US Open*.

He kept himself updated with Sports news from around the World.

Three prophets of Indian nationalism –*Swami Vivekananda, Aurobindo Ghosh, and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose* – cast a profound impact and deep-seated influence throughout Asok Mukhopadhyay's life and career. Their philosophy, teachings, ideas and thinking had a significant effect on his beliefs, ideology, principles and thought process. ■

Inputs credit: Samik Mukherjee (Son)