

Professor Debi Prasad Chattopadhyay – A Birth Centenary Tribute

Kaushik Bagchi

Economist & Literature.

Professor Debi Prasad Chattopadhyay was an internationally illustrious Indian philosopher who has made epoch making contribution to the exploration of the radicalism and materialistic current in ancient Indian philosophical paradigm. He was not merely a practitioner of science in the conventional sense of the term but an ardent champion of the scientific and rationalistic methodology applied to the study of ancient Indian philosophical thought. He was neither a chauvinist nor a romantic but he was truly rationalist and radicalism. It was his lifelong noble mission to trace back the scientific roots of Indian philosophy and culture. He is aptly designated as the chronicler of scientific facts and figures. In modern India he is rightly entitled as the founding father of the Lokayata School of Indian Philosophy based on ancient Indian scientific and materialistic methodology.

Dr. Debi Prasad Chattopadhyay was born on 19th November 1918 in Calcutta. Right from his student days he had a life-long commitment to progressive and radicalism stream of Indian philosophy and politics. Since his student career Chattopadhyaya had the life-long association with democratic cultural movement by associating himself with the Association of Progressive Writer's Forum in 1936.

He was the legendary doyen of Indian philosophers and ideologists. He was by training and by Profession a true philosopher who obtained his academic training in philosophy under the aegis of Calcutta University and Obtained his B.A. (1939) and M.A. (1942) with extra ordinarily brilliant performances securing high first class. He had the fortune of being nurtured under the ever inspiring guidance of the eminent philosophers of international acclaim such as Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Dr. S.N. Das Gupta. He pursued his Doctoral Research under the wise guidance of Professor S.N. Das Gupta. Thereafter, Chattopadhyaya began his teaching Profession at the prestigious University of Calcutta for two decades. Subsequently he was appointed as the U.G.C visiting Professor of Andhra University and University of Poona.

He was intimately associated with the multidisciplinary research projects of Indian Council of Historical Research (I.C.H.R), Indian Council of Philosophical Research (I.C.P.R) and National Institute of Science, Technology and Development Studies (N.I.S.T.A.D.S) of council of scientific and industrial research. Professor Chattopadhyaya path breaking work "Lokayata- Study in Ancient Indian Materialism" (1959) is really a brain storming master piece that stirred the academic world with new wave of thought provoking and enlightened fusion of scientific materialism and philosophical rationalism in ancient India with a view to trace their evolutionary pace and pattern. While commenting on his celebrated work of "Lokayata", the great German ideologist professor Walter Ruben entitled him as the pioneering thought reformer who was absolutely conscious of his great responsibility towards his people living in a period of struggle for national awakening and of the worldwide struggle between the forces of materialism, progress, humanism and peace against imperialism. The celebrated philosopher Dr. Joseph Needham succinctly observed that "It is truly extraordinary that we should have approached ancient Chinese and ancient Indian civilization with such similar result. Louis Renou legendary doyen of French Indologists remarked "This book is of definite value and which finds a truly treasured place which it deserves to be carefully studied by the indologists and sociologists". Truly this master piece has revolutionarised the pace and pattern of philosophical thinking in Indian that has ushered in a new era in the literature of modern philosophical theory.

As the erudite and indefatigable scholar and prolific writer Professor Chattopadhyaya has more than fifty volumes of learned works and a considerable number of edited works to his credits. He was largely recognized as the brilliant and promising literature of Bengal. He had a distinctive style of literary creativity of his own characterized by extremely down to earth looking style and lucid way of exposition. Along with many literary stalwarts like the great poet Bishnu Dey, Chattopadhyaya established antifascist writer's association. In the late 40's and 50's he was

E-mail Id: kbagchi100@rediffmail.com

How to cite this article: Bagchi K. Professor Debi Prasad Chattopadhyay – A Birth Centenary Tribute. *J Adv Res Humani Social Sci* 2018; 5(3): 28-29.

Copyright (c) 2018 Journal of Advanced Research in Humanities and Social Science (ISSN: 2349-2872)



popularly known as the author of children's literature and composed several short stories, novels, popular science fictions and biographies for children's. In fact he had a versatile and facile pen to his credit and collaborated with his elder brother Kamakshi Prasad in editing and running "Rangmashal" a children's journal and sanket a short lived but promising Bengali periodical. Besides he wrote several Bengali booklets on science, Anthropology, Biology, Psychology etc that are the brilliant literary gems of popular scientific literature. Along with his contemporary legendary poet Subhash Mukhopadhyay he should be credited with according Bengali poems and prose a new shape. He was also intimately associated with Samar Sen, the great intellectual, poet and founder editor of the frontier journal.

In this context it is worth-mentioning that his celebrated masterpiece "Lokayata" had been translated into a good number of Indian. Foreign languages including Russian, Chinese and Japanese which opened a new vista in the study of materialism in India.

Being an erudite and indefatigable Scholar Professor Chattopadhyaya has the unique credit of comprising more than fifty volumes and a considerable number of edited learned works and philosophy to his credit. In his celebrated masterpiece "what is living and what is dead in Indian philosophy seeks to explore new grounds based on an analysis of our ancient philosophical requirements viewed from the secularist rationalistic and scientific perspective".

Similarly "In India Atheism – A Marxist Analysis" (1969). He discussed a coherent historical account of atheism in Indian. This is indeed a provocative critic of the standard accounts of Indian philosophy and religion. This is a well argued and profusely documented scholarly work and "An unbiased scrutiny of the Vedas showing the total absence of religious consciousness in its earlier stage. In Science and Society in Ancient India (1977) he scientifically analyzed how societal division of the time shaped the development of science. His focus of interest has been shifted to the scientific study of the history and philosophy of science in ancient India. His logical argument went much beyond the philosophical speculation of his illustrious teacher and the distinguished philosopher Professor Surendra Nath Das Gupta. In this work Professor Chattopadhyay developed a deep scientific insight and exhibited his true acumen as a historian of ideas in this celebrated work. Here Chattopadhyaya succinctly observes "If anywhere in ancient Indian thought, we are permitted to see the real". Anticipation of the view that knowledge is power – which when further worked out, assumes the formulation that freedom is the recognition of necessity – it is to be found among the practitioner of the healing art. His another Magnum Opus "History of science and technology in ancient India" (In three volumes 1986, 1991 and 1996, third volume being published posthumously), his avid interest as an explorer sought to analyze the philosophical perspective of the history of development of different branches of ancient

science and technology life medicine, surgery, astronomy geometry etc. This study has created a new paradigm for the study of the history of science and technology in the orient against the social, historical back drop.

Besides he also edited a scholarly journal "Indian Studies Past And Present 1959 – 1973". Along with Dr. Mrinal Kanti Gangopadhyay translated M.M. Phani Bhushana Tarkavagisa's Nyayasutra and its commentary, he also edited the English translation of Lama Taranatha's Tibetan work, history of Buddhism in India (1970). He also edited "History and Society", N.R. Roy felicitation volume (1978), three volume collection of essays entitled "Marxism and Ideology" (1981). He was the firm believer in human progress, science and reason. A born polemicist, he was never hesitant to call a spade a spade. He had the highest regards for Walter Ruben, John Somerville and Burrows Dunham. With D.D. Kosambi, Trevor Ling and Dale Riepe he had a life-long and friendship. The personal archives of Chattopadhyaya contain records of his correspondence with litterateurs, philosophers, historians and friends from all over the World. He was not an Ivory Tower or abstract philosopher but he was truly a philosopher of action. The theological and technical aspects of Debiprasad's writings are always dialectically connected based on dialectical rationalism as opposed to Hegelian dialectical idealism. His philosophical writings have not only national but also global orientation and importance. His works are marked by burning hope and resolute optimism rather than pessimism.

Professor Chattopadhyaya breath his last on 8th May, 1993. In recognition of Professor Chattopadhyay's towering personality and his versatile and brilliant works on modern philosophical theorization the great philosopher Professor Rajendra Prasad commented "his scholarly pursued is the resultant outcome of his mission to values of scholarship as to the socialist and democratic movement in India. His efforts to explain materialism and atheism in Indian philosophy in its antiquity, against the old fashioned conception that India was and is the land of dreamers and mystics, required "Tremendous intellectual courage". Commenting on his learned works Louis Renou wrote "your books are of definite value and deserves to be carefully studied by Indologists and sociologists".

Selected books of D.P. Chattopadhyay

1. Lokayata: A Study in Ancient Indian Materialism (1959).
2. Indian Philosophy: A Popular Introduction (1964).
3. Indian Atheism: A Marxist Analysis (1969).
4. What is Living and What is Dead in Indian Philosophy (1976).
5. Science and Society in Ancient India (1977).
6. An Encyclopaedia of South Indian Culture (1983).
7. Religion and Society (1987).
8. History of Science and Technology in Ancient India (1991).

Date of Submission: 2018-10-24
 Date of Acceptance: 2018-11-12