

Prof Tarapada Mukherji – Remembrance

It is hardly possible for me to be impartial and objective while writing about Prof. Tarapada Mukherji (T.P.M. to those who closely knew him). I was fortunate enough to receive considerable affection from him and I was also privileged to be one of his pupils.

T.P.M. came from a remote village of Birbhum district, named Sandhyajal, situated at a short distance from Rampurhat. While he was still very young, both of his parents died. He was a meritorious student and secured a merit scholarship in his Matriculation Examination. T.P.M. had taken admission in the first year class of the Presidency College and became a boarder in the Eden Hindu Hostel. I presume that arriving in the City to which he was then a total stranger, T.P.M. needed friends to lean upon. Our second uncle late Umaprasad Mookerjee (whom we called Sejka) who was born in the same year as T.P.M., also had joined the Presidency College. T.P.M. and Sejka had come to know each other and soon became close friends. Their friendship had lasted till death parted them. In the College, they had a large circle of friends and with many of them both T.P.M. and Sejka had continued to keep in touch even after they left College. Amongst them, perhaps the two most intimate were late Pabitra Kumar Basu (who later joined Indian Audit and Accounts Service) and Indumadhab Das (who leaving his studies unfinished went away to Germany and later returned and joined Indian Security Printing Press at Nasik). Bimal Kumar Bhattacherjee (who joined Judicial Service and was ultimately elevated as a Judge of the



Calcutta High Court) was another intimate friend of our Sejka and T.P.M. Contemporaries of T.P.M. included Prof. Amulyadhan Mukherjee, Prof. Akshoy Jiban Bose, Prof. Santanu Mukherjee, S.N. Roy, I.C.S. who became the Chief Secretary West Bengal, Mr. Hiren L. Biswas (who qualified for Bar and then joined Indian Railway Service) Niranjan Mukerjee, Dr. Amiya Kumar Basu, Prof. Khagendra Nath Sen, Prof. Hari Charan Ghosh and many others. I was told that Mr. Sachin Chowdhury, wellknown Barrister and sometime Finance Minister of India was also their classmate but, after passing Intermediate Examination, he proceeded to England to pursue his studies.

T.P.M. used to frequently visit our home 77, Asutosh Mookerjee Road, therefore he had come to know me fairly well long before I entered the portals of the Presidency College. I recall that on one occasion my second uncle had presented him with a copy of the book “Appreciations” by Pater from the Collections of our grandfather Sir Asutosh Mookerjee. T.P.M. often used to confide in Sejka even regarding his personal affairs. Sejka in his turn valued T.P.M.’s opinion particularly in literary matters; when Sejka began to write books on his wanderings in the Himalayas and elsewhere, he would sometimes hand over the manuscripts of his writings to T.P.M. for his perusal.

While I was waiting for publication of my Matriculation Examination results, one day T.P.M. called me and gave me a list of books suggesting that I ought to read them as first steps in acquainting myself with the English literature.

When I joined the first year Arts class of the Presidency College I was somewhat overawed by its ambience which was so very different from the school from which I had been transposed to the College.

My impressions about the different teachers who took our English Classes, were however not identical. Apurba Kumar Chanda who had recently joined as the Principal of the College, was allotted in our routine one period every week. We had already heard about his proximity to Poet Rabindranath. With his corpulence, Prof. Chanda however did no longer bear any resemblance to Amit Ray of "Sesher Kabita". But Principal Chanda still retained a measure of flamboyance. Perhaps his duties as the Principal of College did not permit him to seriously take up his teaching assignment. Prof. Ahmed Ali who had acquired fame as the author of the novel "Twilight in Delhi" looked quite elegant in his two-piece suit and soft hat. But it was obvious, teaching callow first year students was not to his liking. Prof. Somenath Maitra was the Head of the English Department. He was most dignified and a competent teacher. Prof Maitra maintained however some distance from the junior students except when functions of Rabindra Parishad used to be held.

In our time decidedly the two most outstanding teachers of English in the College were Prof. Tarak Nath Sen and Prof. Tarapada Mukherji. Both continued the tradition of excellence in English teaching for which the Presidency College was renowned. Elsewhere rich tributes have been paid to Prof. Tarak Nath Sen, therefore I refrain from further referring to him. Prof Tarapada Mukherji's accent may not have been impeccable, but his exposition was superb and, with his sense of drama, almost captivated us. I need not further elaborate these aspects of T.P.M. and I leave to others to write about his academic attainments and his great success as a teacher. I would rather prefer to write a few lines about T.P.M. whom I had an opportunity to see from close quarters. I can unhesitatingly testify about the innate goodness of T.P.M. and his modesty and unfailing courtesy. Unlike one of his colleagues, T.P.M. did not flaunt his learning and never was he contemptuous of scholarship of others. In spite of his standing in the academic field and attainment of a fair measure of success in the wordly affairs, T.P.M. all along retained his humility.

T.P.M. had his share of sorrows and disappointments, but he was never overwhelmed by them. In spite of his urbane manners, throughout his life, T.P.M. retained his simplicity and did not forget that his roots were in village Sandhyajal near Baswa. While he had a keen sense of humour he did not however bear malice against those whom he disliked. An operation by a well known surgeon slightly disfigured his face, but he did not bear any ill will against his surgeon.

I retain most pleasant memories about time spent in his company. He had joined Sejka (Umaprasad Mookerjee) in visiting Ajanta and Ellora caves which were then within Hyderabad State. He was a most pleasant companion and thoroughly appreciated the frescoes and sculptures of these places as also the culinary excellence of Hyderabadi food served in the Rest House near Ellora. His Hindi speaking was atrocious and caused us much merriment but he had the sense of humour to join in the laughter.

If T.P.M. was alive today he would have the satisfaction of witnessing that his proficiency and love of English literature had devolved upon not only his elder son Asoke (Prof. Asoke Mukherji) but also thereafter upon his two grand daughters. I join in offering homage to Prof. Tarapada Mukherji in the year of his birth Centenary.

* Economics (1944-50)