

Professor Bhupesh Chandra Mukherjee (1910-1997)

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On November 24, 1997 Professor Bhupesh Chandra Mukherjee passed away. He was 87. Professor Mukherjee taught history at Presidency College for over ten years between 1948 and 1958. Professor Mukherjee also worked as the Head of the Department for some time immediately after the retirement of Professor Sushobhan Chandra Sarkar.

Born in Dacca in 1910 Bhupeshbabu studied at Pagose School and Armanitollah High School. He did his first degree and Masters in History from Dacca University. His father Paresh Chandra Mukherjee was a Professor of History at Dacca University. The Mukherjees are originally from Bajrajogini, a village in Vikrampur, Dacca.

Professor Mukherjee was a student of the Dacca University during its most glorious days. Professor Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, Professor Satyendra Nath Bose, Professor A. K. Chanda, Professor Jnan Chandra Ghosh and Professor Sushobhan Chandra Sakar were some of the luminaries who adorned the faculty list of the University at that time. He had, as fellow students on campus, A. W. Mahmood, Pratul Chandra Rakshit, Buddhadev Bose, Amalendu Bose, Abani Mohan Kushari and many others who later on attained fame in their respective professions. As a student at Dacca he was famous for his skill in various games. He was a University Blue in soccer, hockey and tennis. As students of Presidency College in the early fifties, we have seen him actively participating in the organisation and conduct of the Annual Sports of the College.

He joined the Educational Service of the State early in his life and taught at government colleges at Chitagong, Dacca, Hooghly till he came to Calcutta where he taught at the Sanskrit College and eventually at Presidency. I think it was in 1952 when I first attended a history class of Professor Mukherjee. We were second year students of Intermediate Arts. The lecture was on a topic of History of England. He had done his home work very well. He was very organized and forceful, perhaps little dramatic in his presentation. We loved it. He

taught 'Medieval Europe' and 'Akbar' at Honours level. Professor Mukherjee was a very useful teacher for examination purposes. He wore brilliant-white dhoti and panjabi in summer and trousers with jacket and tie in winter. He was a handsome man and always wore a smile on his face.

After he left Presidency, he worked as Principal of Barasat College and Moulana Abul Kalam Azad College. Later on he worked as the Assistant Director of Public Instruction, Secretary, West Bengal Public Service Commission and as the Chairman, Board of Secondary Education. In 1982 at the age of 72 he accepted the Vice-Chancellorship of Vidyasagar University in Midnapore. The appointment meant the task of 'creating' a university on a 130-acre plot of land somewhere in the outskirts of the town of Midnapore.

I had just come back to Calcutta after 21 years of teaching/research at several places outside India. I was looking for an opening at an academic institution and got chosen for the Registrar's post at Vidyasagar. My Professor became my boss at my place of work and I got to know Bhupeshbabu much better. I was amazed by his unbounded energy, commitment and ability. I thoroughly enjoyed working with him. He had complete confidence in me and practically gave a blank cheque in matters of policy decisions. But funnily, in other matters, he would treat me as his pupil and expected unquestioning obedience from me. The campus, at that time, had no physical facilities at all. There were no quarters for the Vice-Chancellor or the Registrar, no canteen. Two of us slept in two office rooms at night and had a watchman to cook our meals. Professor Mukherjee had definite plans about the menu for the day and he was very surprised when I told him that I would be perfectly happy with whatever he chose. But problem arose when I offered him money for the food we were eating. He was upset and told me that as a teacher he could not accept money for food from his student. I insisted on payment and even threatened to arrange for separate cooking of my meals if he did not take money. He grudgingly yielded.

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Professor Mukherjee died in a general ward at the Ramkrishna Mission Seva Pratisthan in Ballygunge. I saw him wear the same Jacket in 1986 which he used to wear in 1952. He lived in a very modest flat in Ballygunge. He always led a very simple life but was tremendously proud of the profession he belonged to. I think he had good

reasons to be proud of what he stood for, Professor Mukherjee belonged to a species that is now almost extinct. ■

[I would like to thank Professor Chitra Adhikari, daughter of Professor Bhupesh Chandra Mukherjee for helping me with information about her father.]