

## Professor Tapas Majumdar

**Amartya Sen**

I am extremely sad to miss this memorial meeting for a person of the greatest importance in my life. I see Tapasda as a truly remarkable guru from whom I have learned so much. He led me into critical understanding of economic theory, and his affection and encouragement always gave me strength, courage and determination. I would like to say a few words through this communication, which I hope could be read at the memorial meeting, on one particular quality of Tapas Majumdar which I was in a specially good position to observe as a student who felt very close to him.

Tapasbabu was not only a magically good teacher, he was also superb in nurturing the intellectual self-confidence of his students, the absence of which could - and often do - limit the development of whatever creativity we may have. Tapasda did, of course, address difficult problems with breath-taking lucidity, but at the same time, he would also suggest original ideas on them and encourage his students also to think for themselves even as they grappled with “received” theories. That encouragement was a very special feature of Tapasda - very rare in the academic world of his time.

When I, along with my classmates (such as Sukhamay Chakravarty and others), encountered Tapasda first, he was a very young teacher who had just completed his own studies. I think some of Tapasda’s concentration on clear-headed lucidity came from a tradition that Presidency College powerfully cultivated in those days, led by that remarkable professor, Bhabatosh Datta, who was probably the best communicator I have ever encountered anywhere in the world. Tapasda shared the same priority, and must have to some extent learned from Bhabatoshbabu how to practice the art of transparent lecturing. Where Tapasda went beyond the established Presidency College tradition was in his insistence that even as we try to understand what a received theory was saying, we - even young undergraduates

like us - must ask the question: what are the limitations of this theory? In a remarkable moment of real education, Tapasda once told me (I was still in my first year at Presidency College): "If some analytical idea you read about appears to you to be erroneous, it could be that you have not followed the reasoning, but it could also be - don't dismiss the possibility - that the received reasoning is simply incorrect!" That was, of course, a heady moment, but also a hugely creative one.

Tapasda was a superb theorist himself, who offered new ideas to the profession on utility theory, educational theory, social choice theory, and other areas of active interest in the contemporary world of economics and social studies. He questioned, often enough, what he found in books and journals, and he wanted his students to do the same. This was not only thrilling for many of us, it was also deeply inspirational. The distinguished Department of Economics of Presidency College was then moving - these were the early years of the 1950s - from education as exquisite learning to education as critical reasoning, and Tapasda was one of the leading figures in that momentous transition.

Tapas Majumdar was remarkable in many different ways. He was a powerful economist, a great educationist, a wonderful human being, and a very warm and affectionate friend. He will be remembered as a major figure in the world of education and economic study. To those widely admired qualities, which made Tapasda such a major figure in the contemporary intellectual world, I wanted to add an extra focus on another exception feature of him: his ability to inspire and to generate self-confidence that is essential for creativity. I know my own intellectual life would have gone very differently but for Tapasda, and this must be true of many other students of him as well. There have been very few people like him.

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