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In Memory of Debiprasad The Pioneer of Marxism In Indian Philosophy

Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya who passed away recently was a towering intellectual who opened the path for Indian Marxists in their endeavours in search of their own philosophy. He can be compared only with another pioneer in the Marxist research into the problems of science and history- the late D.D. Kosambi.

Though basically a scholar in Mathematics and other exact sciences, Kosambi showed the way for the subsequent generations of Marxist historians in India, Chattopadhyaya for his part was basically a philosopher who used his erudition for such dedicated service to the cause of research that he became the pioneer, and so far the unrivalled proponent, of Marxism in Indian philosophy.

I had the privilege of reviewing some of his valuable works to one of which I refer in the course of this article. I however did not dare make a serious review of the original work which made him famous in India and abroad-*Lokayata*. Nor did I have the occasion to go into such other masterly works of his as *What is living and what is dead in Indian philosophy*, *History of Science and*

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Technology in Ancient India, and above all, *Global philosophy for Everyman*. I therefore propose in this article to deal briefly with these major works.

LOKAYATA

The full title of his work was *Lokayata: A Study in Ancient Indian Materialism*. Brought out in 1959 in its first edition, it received warm welcome in academic circles in India and abroad.

Professor Joseph Needham of Cambridge wrote to the author of the book:

“Your work will have a truly treasured place on my shelves. It is truly extraordinary that we should have approached ancient Chinese and ancient Indian civilizations with such similar results. Of course, I am not competent to criticise your presentation but I can only say that it strikes me as exceedingly convincing.”

Two scientific journals in Paris also wrote appreciatively of the work of the author.

“The book is of a definite value and deserves to be carefully studied by indologists and sociologists,” wrote one, while the other said: “It is acknowledged on all sides that Indian materialism needs to be reconstructed, the original source books having been lost. D. Chattopadhyaya not only reconstructs it but also provides an explanation of the same on the basis of Marxist analysis of social phenomena. A new effort almost entirely.”

In India too, the *Amritabazar Patrika* wrote: “This well-written and eminently readable book will create a stir in the realm of international thought. Like an eminent archeologist, the author has gathered with great care the fragments of debris lying here and there to reconstruct an old monument of the past.”

Lokayata was a truly path-breaking work. It dissipated the falsehood that, while the West has always been materialist, India has been spiritual- a story spread both by the ideologues of the foreign rulers as well as by the Hindu revivalists in India. Basing himself on and using the enormous amount of material which

became available, though most of it had been lost, Chattopadhyaya showed that not only had ancient India a tradition of materialism but that materialism or what he calls “proto-materialism” preceded the Vedas, considered to be the most ancient literary and philosophical works in India.

Going through voluminous material, he showed that *Lokayata*, or the materialist philosophy of the common people, was in existence in the pre-Vedic culture of the Indus Valley civilization. Coming to this conclusion, he explained its significance for the subsequent development of Indian culture and philosophy. He says in the introduction:

“What is the significance of the recognition of the primitive proto-materialism which forms the sub-stratum of both the *Lokayata* and Vedic traditions? My answer is simple enough. Its value is comparable to the recognition of primitive communism in Marxism. The Marxists emphasise the importance of primitive communism not because they dream of a return to it. The purpose is rather to show that private property and the state machinery are not external adjuncts to human existence. They will fall as inevitably as they arose at an earlier stage.” Similarly, the primitive proto-materialism is discussed not for the purpose of a glorification of it and surely there is not even the remotest apology for any return to it. Yet, it has its value by way of showing that the spiritualistic outlook is not innate in man. It too will be finally washed away as inevitably as it arose at an earlier stage. If the spiritualistic outlook came into being, it will also, along with the social separation between manual and mental level, pass away. This has some particular relevance for the understanding of the Indian philosophical tradition. For, we are never tired of listening that spiritualism is an inherent view of Indian thought.”

LOKAYATA AND THE VEDAS

As a Marxist intellectual, he goes into the question of what is the

socio-economic basis of what is called “proto-materialism”, both in the *Lokayata* and the subsequent *Vedic* tradition. Ploughing thorough enormous material and interpreting them, he comes to the conclusion that it is a society where the separation between labour and thought had not been brought about. Furthermore, the society existing at that time (both in the era of *Lokayata* and of the *Vedic* tradition) was basically tribal, with its collective labour, collective thinking, collective arts and culture, there was however one difference between the *Lokayata* and the *Vedic* society. The former was agricultural and matriarchal; the latter was pastoral and patriarchal. The re-capitulation of the arguments advanced in the first chapter of the book is as follows:

“*Lokayata* means the philosophy of the people. It also means the philosophy which is this-worldliness or instinctive materialism. The original works of the *Lokayatikas* being lost beyond any prospect of recovery, we have got to reconstruct them mainly on the basis of the reference to them found in the writings of their opponents.....By *Lokayata* was meant those popular and obscure beliefs and practices that are particularly referred to as *Tantrism*. Spiritual and other worldly ideas were subsequently superimposed on *Tantrism* but original *Tantrism*, like the more philosophical version known as *Sankhya*, was atheistic and materialistic.

“But *Tantrism* repels the modern mind mainly because of its obsession with sex. Those who claimed in the later times to be the champions of the *Vedic* tradition were full of contempt for *Tantrism* mainly because of this. Yet these same elements strongly criticized the ancient *Vedic* outlook itself. Therefore, the presumption is that these had originally some significance other than what the modern mind is hastily inclined to attribute to them. The problem of the ancient *Lokayata* thus becomes largely the problem of finding out the original significance.”

The exceedingly interesting story of how the original *Lokayata* was supplanted by the early *Vedas*, the latter by the subsequent *Vedas* which in turn were supplanted by the *Upanishads*, and how

there was resistance to every such change from the preceding philosophical outlook, is narrated in the subsequent chapters. These historical developments in the field of philosophy had their basis and origin in the history of social development- the disintegration of the originally tribal socio-economic system, the emergence of the new system of *Dwija-Sudra Varnas*, the further development of this system into the new complex system of castes and sub-castes dominated by the *Dwijas*, leading to the emergence of the Brahmin-dominated caste system against which there was furious resistance as shown by the widespread movement led by the *Budhist* and *Jaina* philosophy as well as by the less widespread *Carvaka* philosophy, is told in the book.

The *Nastika* philosophers who refused to recognize the authority of the *Vedas* including the *Lokayatikas* had thus to fight a continuous struggle against the *Astikas* who recognized the authority of the *Vedas*. These two trends of philosophical thinking fighting among themselves was the specific Indian form in which classes and class struggle emerged in ancient India and continued in the medieval and even modern times. The ideological struggle between the present-day spiritualism and materialism is thus theoretical manifestation of the social struggle, i.e., between the minority of the *Dwijas* and the overwhelming majority of the *Sudras*.

This means that the struggle waged by Indian materialism against Indian spiritualism and idealism had not only many shades of differences in ancient days, but there are conflicts between modern materialism (Marxism) and modern idealism and spiritualism. We the representatives of modern materialism (Marxism) are not enamoured of the ancient and medieval forms of materialism as is seen in the *Lokayata*, the early *Vedas*, the *Buddhist*, the *Jain*, the *Carvaka* and the *Sankhya* philosophies. They all have their deficiencies from the point of view of modern materialism (Marxism).

Nevertheless, we recognized the importance of the struggle between the proto-materialism of the *Lokayatikas* and the early

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Vedas as well as the subsequent trends of materialist philosophy seen in the *Buddhist*, the *Jain*, the *Carvaka*, the *Sankhya* and other ancient and medieval materialist philosophies in India. While we value them all, we want to integrate their valuable teachings with the tenets and theoretical principles of modern materialism (Marxism).

Such in summary is the content of the first major work of India's Marxist philosophy as expounded by Chattopadhyaya.

WHAT IS LIVING AND WHAT IS DEAD IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

The second major work produced by Chattopadhyaya is titled "*What is living and what is dead in Indian Philosophy*". This is a sequel to the *Lokayata* as is clear from the author's preface to the Third Edition of the *Lokayata* where he says:

"In 1973, one naturally feels like amending and altering a lot of what one wrote sometime before 1959 when the first book appeared. I felt the same in 1967 when there was the proposal for its second edition. But then I did not try this for I could see that the new material I wanted to add and the way in which I wanted to reformulate my arguments called for so much change that it was preferably done in the form of a separate book altogether. In the preface to the second edition I actually promised such a book to the readers suggesting for it the title: *Further studies in Indian Materialism*."

However, when he started writing the new book, he realised how very wrong he was. "There are", he says "mainly two reasons that make the process much more time consuming than originally thought of. Firstly, it needs also the work of clearing up a huge heap of intellectual interpretation of the Indian philosophical tradition..... Secondly, the more I tried to work out the materialist tradition in Indian philosophy, the more clearly did I see that this could not be done without some account of its anti-thesis in Indian philosophy, or more specifically of the tradition of the world-denying idealism.

If the history of Indian philosophy meant the history of a more or less continuous philosophical activity stretched over a period of about two thousand five hundred years i.e., from the *Upanishads* which are placed roughly in the 7th or 8th century B.C. to the great representative of Indian logic and atomism, viz., Gadadhara, who wrote his book in the 17th century A.D; it had throughout been history of the struggles, sometimes subdued and sometimes acute, carried out between these two basic trends. Besides, with this basic struggle was related a number of collateral philosophical positions. Thus, just as the materialist trend was always committed to secularism, rationalism and science-orientation, the idealistic trend had for its correspondence mysticism, obscurantism and scripture-orientation. From the point of view of this basic struggle the picture that seems to emerge by the Indian philosophical tradition has a great significance for the understanding of the basic ideological struggle still going on.”

It was out of these new insights into the problems of and situations in Indian philosophy that he decided to change the title from *Further Studies in Indian Materialism* to *What is Living and What is Dead in Indian Philosophy*.

While thus being a continuation of the earlier Lokayata, the new book, *What is Living and What is Dead in Indian Philosophy*, is entirely new. Covering the same ground as in the earlier work, the latter work systematically expounds the theories of idealism and materialism. It is in Part-IV under the title *Allied Problems*, together with Part-I dealing with methodology that the author deals systematically with the existence of dialectics in Indian philosophy.

In section two of Chapter-I, the author explains the methodology of debate among the ancient Indian philosophers which he says was “something akin to what the ancient Greeks called dialectic, i.e., the art of debate by questions and answers. For all that we know, however, in the Upanishadic period itself, there developed a strong trend at least among a section of philosophers to

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disparage *Vako Vakya* as something of more dominant value. These philosophers, as we shall later see, are keener on preserving their 'secret wisdom' in which it is not easy to be initiated. But such an attitude does not stifle the art of debate and eventual development of Indian logic from it, thanks mainly to the ancient Indian science and scientific methods. Their earliest available work- the huge *Caraka Samhita* compiled not later than A.D. 100 – shows the first clear awareness of the importance of the clash of ideas as an aid to the positive enrichment of theoretical equipment...

“The art of debate seriously taken raises questions concerning evidence, argument and fallacious thinking. The work on ancient Indian medicine raises and answers these questions and thus builds up the original core of Indian logic or proto-logic.”

This is the beginning of dialectics in Indian philosophy. But unlike the Greek dialogo, the Indian logic does not have the tripod of thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis. Its place is taken by *Poorva Paksha* and *Sidhanta Paksha*. The difference between Greek dialogos and Indian Logic is this: in Greek dialogo, out of the clash between *thesis* and *anti-thesis* a *synthesis* emerges which in its turn, becomes a *new thesis* which creates its own *anti-thesis*. So *synthesis* at one stage becoming the thesis in the next stage is the process through which the unending process of development of ideas takes place in Greek dialectics. India on the other hand has a simple logic in which the *Poorva Paksha* is fought against and defeated by the *Sidhanta Paksha*.

This reflects the actual process of the idealism, which became consolidated towards the end of the *Vedic* period, into the *Vedanta* system defeating materialism. Materialism which is the anti-thesis of idealism, having been defeated, there is no further progress in philosophical thinking. This is how stagnation starts both in Indian society and in the philosophical thinking of India.

The objective basis of this defeat of materialsim at the hands of idealism lies in the fact that the class struggle in the form of *Dwijas-vs-Sudras* has come to an end with the consolidation

of the power of *Dwijas* and the defeat of the *Sudras*- a point which is further explained by Chattopadhyaya in some of his subsequent writings.

DIALECTICS IN ANCIENT INDIA

Let us now refer to Chapter IX of *What is living and What is Dead in Indian Philosophy*- a chapter titled "Change and Permanence and Dialectics." Section two of the chapter begins, 'so far we have mentioned only Buddhists in connection with the logical outlook because they are its representatives par excellence. But this does not mean that in Indian philosophy they are its only representatives nor that they- throughout the long history of Buddhism as religion and philosophy-invariably represented the view with the same enthusiasm. Outside the strict circle of the Buddhists there are distinct tendencies to look at everything as perpetually changing- ceaselessly coming into being and passing away. But such tendencies do not have an impact on Indian thought comparable to that of the Buddhist theory of universal flux. Again, among the Buddhists, the theory has a complex history. There are even tendencies to disown it altogether. Nevertheless, even those among the Buddhists who want in fact to flout it are obliged to pretend that they are working out some novel interpretations of it, as it were. An outright formal rejection of the view proved practically impossible consistent with the claim of basic evolution of the teachings of the Buddha- so vital is the relevance of the view for Buddhism."

While thus the *Lokayatas* were the most consistent representatives of the materialist trend in philosophy, the Buddhists were more consistent in their dialectical world outlook. The *Lokayatikas* in their materialism and the Buddhists in their dialectics plus materialism were the most developed among Indian philosophers, showing that ancient Indian philosophy had the potential of developing into the philosophy of modern

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dialectical materialism, provided the socio-economic and political conditions were mature.

In fact, however, these conditions were not only not mature but their further evolution was positively hampered by the development of the Indian version of class struggle- the domination of the *Dwijas* over the *Sudras*-which, in its turn, prepared the soil on which whatever was materialistic and dialectical in ancient Indian philosophy was destroyed. This was the beginning of the socio-political stagnation that took India away from the natural historical development that took place in European countries following the development of the Greek dialectics and Greek materialism.

SCIENCE AND SOCIETY IN ANCIENT INDIA

The third major work produced by Chattopadhyaya to which we desire to draw the attention of the readers is *Science and Society in Ancient India*. Although the title makes it appear as if he is making a survey of all the sciences in ancient India and the social background against which they arose, the book in fact concerns itself only with the science of medicine. The reason is that “the only discipline that promises to be fully secular and containing clear potentials of the modern understanding of natural sciences is medicine.”

Extensively quoting from the two major works of ancient medicine, *Caraka Samhita* and *Susruta Samhita* Chattopadhyaya shows how the ancient doctors based themselves on the material world, rather than any divine knowledge. We would like to give a quotation from *Caraka Samhita* to illustrate the point:

“By the body is meant that combination of matter in five forms which serve, as the sub-stratum of consciousness which (normally) maintains the balance (of the body elements).

When therefore the body elements become discordant, the body suffers disease and even death. This tendency towards discordance of the body elements again is brought about by their hyper-trophy or atrophy, whether partial or complete”.

“This hyper-trophy or atrophy of the body elements resulting from their mutual conflict takes place simultaneously, because whatever factor tends to increase one body element tends at the same time to decrease another body constituent which is opposed to it....

Therefore, medicine is that which, when rightly administered, becomes at the same time a harmonizing of the increased or decreased body elements. It brings down the element that has become excessive and at the same time augments the deficient one opposed to it.”

Having given this quotation from *Caraka Samhita*, Chattopadhyaya adds his own comment:

“In trying to explain the theoretical foundations of therapeutic technique, the ancient physicians are confronted with a situation which is actually far more complicated than is covered by their simple formula of restoring the balance of the body elements by increasing or decreasing some specific form which, using natural substances with like or unlike qualities.”

“It requires centuries of patient research to move towards a gradually perfected knowledge in the nature of matter, and of the laws of its transformation only on the strength of which this problem of matter composition of things can possibly be better grasped than is actually done by the ancient doctors viewing matter merely as earth, water, air etc. What interests us however is to see how the theoreticians of medical science did pioneering work not only in formulating the problem but also in developing some conceptual tools for solving it.”

Such a materialist outlook and the scientific conclusions drawn from the empirical study of the overcoming of nature including the human body, explained by Chattopadhyaya, had prerequisites for developing into modern science provided it was allowed to develop. Such a development was not allowed. Over the struggle between man and nature, the struggle for exercising man's control over nature, was superimposed the struggle between

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man and man i.e. for exploitation.

Chattopadhyaya, in this context of the emergence of two major socio-cultural forces in ancient Indian society, refers to the 'Lordly power' or Kshatriya and the 'Holy power' or the Brahmin, together with the farmer trader or Vaisya, (the three together constituting "*Dwija*" or the exploiting class) as opposed to the mass of laboring people called the *Sudras*.

The 'Lordly power' that exercises its domination over society is supplemented by the 'Holy power'. The latter developed the theory that nature, the thing around man, are not what they appear to be. To quote Chattopadhyaya, "the kings and nobles realised – perhaps not with some surprise- that they also need men who can construct theories, i.e., to say, thinkers capable of manufacturing speculative theories justifying their power and privileges. Thinkers catering to political needs of the ruling power must begin with a distorted description of reality. Since ruling power cannot afford to have the truth generally known, it needs ideologists who know first of all the technique of twisting, concealing and mystifying the actual nature of the world along with everything that goes with it. Only after achieving this can they add to the requirements of the ruling power the halo of supernatural sanction."

It was out of this that a social force arose for which it was necessary to inflict a mortal defeat on the material philosophical thoughts of the *Lokayata* and the early Vedas which were by and large based on proto-materialism. The early materialist philosophy was thus supplanted by the subsequently evolved philosophy of idealism. This is what led to the dethroning of medicine from the high pedestal on which it had been installed in the earlier days to a low rank. The demotion of the twin Gods, Aswins, who were praised for their wisdom, skill, humanism, etc., in the early Vedic texts became in the later *Vedas*, *Brahmanas*, etc., inferior Gods. By the time of the law givers beginning with Manu onwards, the practitioners of medicine came to be frowned upon, the Brahmins being forbidden to learn or practice medicine.

This demotion of medical science in ancient India, it can be seen, is indicative of the fall of those classes and strata of society who worked with their hands to transform nature for the benefit of man to a position of inferiority in relation to those who did not labour but owned the bulk of the wealth produced by the working people. It bars the path of advance not only for the science of medicine but for all other fields of knowledge. For, combination of 'Lordly power' and 'Holy power' which was the hall mark of society with the anti-science ideology. At this stage begins the stagnation and decay of philosophical and scientific thought.

HISTORY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY IN
ANCIENT INDIA-THE BEGINNINGS

The next major work which we desire to draw the attention of the readers is a volume under the above title, written by Chattopadhyaya at the instance of the National Institute of Science, Technology and Development Studies, a constituent establishment of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research. In the author's preface to the volume, Chattopadhyaya wrote:

“One of the special problems created in the country is the illusion fomented by the regional chauvinists, communalists and fundamentalists, is their claim to be the real custodians of our national cultural heritage. The claim is a fiction-in fact, the most dangerous fiction. And it has got to be debunked.

But it cannot be debunked with mere demagogy. We have to lead our people to meet the technicians, engineers and scientists in our own history and to show how they were defending the scientific temper in their own way, defying the dark forces that threatened it. This had indeed been a very significant aspect of our national cultural heritage. We have also to try to lead our people to see what, in the past, inhibited our scientists-with all their personal gifts- to move forward to what is ordinarily called modern science, i.e., the science in the sense that developed in

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Europe from the days of Galileo and others. When we do this, we are confronted with an unexpected situation. The factors that inhibited the development of modern science in Indian history are inclusive of those that are still creating the zeal for casteism and communalism, murder etc. In other words, we meet the same monster from whom inspiration is still being drawn, often surreptitious though also often overtly.”

Chattopadhyaya goes on: “That is why a study of science in Indian history is more than a mere academic exercise. It is linked up also with the question of our very survival.”

Here is therefore an Indian Marxist philosopher who is also a thinker of high order in sociological and political sciences. Science and the history of science for him is not for the sake of science and the history of science on its own. It, on the other hand, is for the advancement of the cause of the scientific temper in general, secularism and a forward-looking attitude to contemporary problems in particular. The major works of the most eminent Marxist theoretician in Indian philosophy thus become so many weapons in the day-to-day practical struggle against the counter-revolutionary forces of superstition, obscurantism and religious fanaticism. Even while remaining basically a theoretician, Chattopadhyaya becomes an active participant in the furious battle between reaction and progress. As the university well known British scholar, Joseph Needhman wrote:

“If there is one thing more than anything else which has characterised the work of Chattopadhyaya from the beginning, it had been his conviction of the importance of relating the history of science, technology and medicine to the social conditions which surrounded their growth. This principle will alone enable us to understand in depth the story of their slow development. For example, take the grand question which looms behind all the volumes of “Science and Civilisation in China”, why, in spite of so many wonderful discoveries and inventions during sixteen or seventeen centuries before the Scientific Revolution, did modern

science not develop in China but only in Europe ? The answer can only be stated in socio-economic terms. Only when one knows that China was characterised by bureaucratic feudalism, while Europe had military-aristocratic feudalism, seemingly stronger but in fact much weaker, and so exposed to overthrows when the time came for the rise of the bourgeoisie; then only can one begin to see why modern science, along with capitalism and reformation, originated in Europe and in Europe alone. How things went in India I could not attempt to say, but I would expect that apart from wars and colonialism, some concrete socio-economic factors will in the end account for the fact that, in spite of wonderful past achievements, modern science did not originate there either.”

“Here in this present book we have the beginning of the story, and most exciting it is. Chattopadhyaya and his colleagues speak of two urbanisations, the first associated with the Indus Valley culture which produced such splendid cities as Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa — roughly speaking corresponding to the Shang-Yin civilisation of China or rather earlier, at the beginning of the second millennium B.C. The reasons for their decline and fall are not yet fully understood, and the subject is discussed here, but it is sure that they were followed by the Aryan invasions and the Vedic Age. Then came the second urbanisation in the sixth century BC.....”

“Perhaps the most illuminating co-relation which this picture contains — or so it was for me— is that the first beginning of mathematical temper in India, later preserved in the *Sulva Sutras* was a direct result of the baked brick industry of the Indus Valley cities. This was rather earlier than either Rome or China, where we do not seem to find baked bricks much, before the Warring-States period in the first millennium B.C. But in any case, this industry was a very early example of mass production, and since size of all bricks had to be exactly specific, their geometrical relationships shown in building naturally follow. But throughout the book, for example in metallurgy and ceramics, there is no lack of other examples of brick coming first, and then theory arising out of it afterwards.”

It will thus be seen that the volume *History of Science and Technology in Ancient India* carries forward the study that Chattopadhyaya had made earlier in the *Science of Medicine in Ancient India*. The canvas is much broader and helps us to see that the beginnings of developing science and technology were in existence in ancient India. Here again, however, we see how the emergence of the combination of 'Lordly power' and 'Holy power' leads to stagnation, Chattopadhyaya incorporates in his introductory chapter the views of the eminent scientist, P.C. Ray, to show that "among the Indian philosophical views, there were some that favoured science or the scientific spirit, just as there were others that were basically hostile to the requirements of natural science. Though not specialising in philosophy, Ray had evidently enough grasp of the Indian philosophical situation to differentiate between the two. Thus he could see that the philosophy of atomism, associated in the popular mind with the name of *Kanada* as its founder, had significant science-potential in ancient Indian context. He could also see that the world- denying metaphysics (*Maya vada*), generally known as 'Sankara's Vedanta', could not but be inimical to science. In P. C. Ray's judgment, therefore, Sankara, too, stood accused for the decline of science in Indian history — a judgment too courageous to pronounce in the Indian context, where Sankara's name often carries the epithet of being an incarnation of God. But Ray had the courage and he declared:

"The Vedanta philosophy, as modified and expanded by Sankara, which teaches the unreality of the material world, is also to a large extent responsible for bringing the study of physical science into disrepute. Sankara is unsparing in his strictures on Kanada and his system.....Among a people ridden by caste and high-bound by the authorities and injunctions of the *Vedas*, *Puranas*, and *Smritis* and having their intellect thus cramped and paralysed, no Boyle* could arise."

(P.C. Ray, History of Hindu Chemistry, vol I, pp 195-7)

Chattopadhyaya adds his own comment on Ray: "Here, again, we come across a working scientist, while enquiring into the history of science in India, realising the need of analysing the interaction of science and philosophy." It cannot but be reminiscent, he says, of what J.D. Bernal observed:

"The idealist side is the side of order, the aristocracy, and established religion....The materialist view, partly because of its practical nature and even more because of its revolutionary implications, did not for centuries find much support in literate circles and rarely formed part of official philosophy....The struggle between idealist and materialist tendencies in science has been a persistent feature in its history from earliest times.....The very persistence of the struggle, despite the successive victories won by materialist science, shows that it is not essentially a philosophic or a scientific one, but a reflection of political struggles in scientific terms. At every stage idealist philosophy has been invoked to pretend that present discontents are illusory and to justify an existing state of affairs. At every stage materialist philosophy has relied on the practical test of reality and on the necessity of change."

In present day world as in ancient India, therefore the struggle between faith and science, between idealism and materialism is a question of class struggle.

GLOBAL PHILOSOPHY FOR EVERY MAN

Having thus interpreted how Chattopadhyaya interpreted Indian philosophy in Marxist terms, it is necessary to mention that his approach to philosophy was not narrowly Indian, it was global. As a matter of fact, the last major work brought (edited) by him is titled *Global Philosophy for Everyman-a Mini Library of Eight Volumes*. Three of the eight volumes were authored by Chattopadhyaya himself, while the other five were written by his collaborators.

The claim made by the editor is that he and his colleagues

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were making “the first attempt to prepare a mini library for lay readers of global philosophy prepared with an awareness of the real ideological requirements of the people. It intends to combine expert knowledge with critical attitude, so that the readers may be led to see what helped as well as hindered the perennial task of philosophy, to know man and nature as well as to improve our behaviours. It comprises an overview of the major philosophical activities all over the world ending with reflections on how future of man is interlinked with the future of philosophy.”

The author’s preface to the first volume is dated May 1, 1990, while that of eighth and last is dated July 9, 1991. It thus took a year and two months for the whole series to be written, edited and printed. It will be useful to note the date of the author’s preface to the volume.....July 9, 1991. Within less than a month and a half of this, it will be recalled, took place what the bourgeois press described as “the coup in the Soviet Union”-the arrest of Gorbachev and the taking over of power by his opponents in the CPSU. The author of the volume in his preface spoke of “the great crisis” confronting the first attempt at the construction of socialist society.

“An experiment on a major scale has been attempted to change the exploitative society ultimately to make room for one without private ownership of the means of production. Great expectations were roused by this, inclusive of the expectation of the new man moving forward with changed consciousness or a set of new values. During the last few years, however, the old motivations of exploitative society, like escaped criminals have started raising their heads. That makes a mockery of the brave words about progress as promised by Marxism.”

“But even admitting the failure of this first experiment, of fundamentally changing society and man (which is after all not as total as it is often made to appear), is it adequate to prove the bankruptcy of Marxism. The presumption is that it is not so. The failure, in so far it is really one, is presumably because of the incompletely controlled conditions under which the experiment

has been proposed or because of some snag in the understanding of the fundamentals of Marxism. Such a presumption seems to be justified by the fact of the success registered hitherto of the same fundamentals in explaining a vast range of other phenomena, both natural and social. That makes it all the more imperative for us to rediscuss, re understand and reemphasis the principles of Marxism.”

This unbounded optimism for the future of Marxism is supplemented by the question: “Is there a viable alternative philosophical view ensuring man of his future? In our present series, after giving some hint of the formation of the Marxist philosophy in the fifth volume, we have deliberately left scope for two volumes to make an honest search for an alternative. But the search has failed. Notwithstanding the unlikely brilliance of a number of thinkers, we have from none of them any message of hope or any technique that ensures man a bright future. The only message we have from them is rather that of the waste land. It may be easy to make a mockery of Marxism. But to evolve a positive alternative to it is not so.”

The author however adds a caution to Marxists. “The assurance of the future, as we have it in Marxism, represents the culmination of the movement that brought modern science into being. These were days of infinitive optimism about science and progress. But where is science going today? If about 60,000 men, women and children in Hiroshima and about 39,000 in Nagasaki are snuffed out in a moment in the recent past and after decades of this the nuclear, biological and other technologies are threatening the very existence of life on earth, who else but an abject fool can still talk of science ensuring a better future for man? This is a question too significant to be avoided in our time. Without facing it the main theme of our present volume is liable to be unconvincing.”

“Fortunately, the question is already answered by John Summerville, Professor Emeritus of the City University of New York, one of the finest Marxists I have met in my life. His recent

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work *The Peace Revolution: Ethics and Social Progress*, is a masterly analysis of the impact of contemporary revolution in science and technology on the problem of human progress. Using extracts from this book as Appendix to mine is about the best way I can conceive of concluding the present series.”

The conclusion thus arrived at by the author and his colleagues of their discussion of the development of philosophy in China, India, Ancient Greece, Medieval and Modern Europe going upto the present century is that, everywhere man began to engage himself in speculative thinking and produce the earliest works of philosophy, there has been a steady progress all over the world towards the Marxist Philosophy and Dialectical and Historical Materialism. That philosophy was generally worked out for the world as a whole and for Europe in particular by Marx Engels and Lenin in their days. Chattopadhyaya in his major work, the *Lokayata*, started applying it to the philosophical thinking and its sociological and political roots in India. The work done by him in this direction and incorporated in the volumes which we have briefly reviewed in this article was carried forward by him, in collaboration with five other colleagues in working out the first systematic (though popular rather than academic) account of the development of what he calls “global philosophy.”

CHATTOPADHYAYA'S RELEVANCE TODAY

Apart from major works reviewed in this article, there are several other works written by him which are popular versions of the basic thinking contained in the works we have reviewed here. There is no need for us to go into these works in detail, since their content has been dealt with in this critique.

Far more important than giving the titles of and reviewing the works of Chattopadhyaya is to evaluate the role his contributions made to the socio-political thinking on the current problems in India. The essence of the contributions made by him through all

his works is to forge a powerful weapon in the struggle against superstition, obscurantism, communalism etc. The socio-political struggle against these was initiated by our freedom movement since its inception and developed by the Left and Democratic movement which took shape under the banner of the freedom movement. Even during the last years of that movement, however, dark forces of superstition, obscurantism and communal divisiveness had started developing. These however grew further during the last couple of years of freedom struggle and still more in post-independence years. The monster that these have created in our national politics as of late constitutes a serious threat to national unity, preservation of freedom, development of democracy and the advancement of progressive socio-cultural forces.

These dark forces represented by the Hindutva movement are making a bid to take our people backwards to what they call "*the Glorious Epoch of the Vedas*"-an epoch in which what Chattopadhyaya calls the combination of "Lordly and Holy powers" came to be established. It is against this that Chattopadhyaya's writings take our people. They therefore will be a powerful weapon in the grim struggle for democracy, secularism and socialism.

- * Robert Boyle (1627-91). Anglo-Irish physicist and chemist. He invented a vacuum pump and used it in the discovery of (1662) of what is now known as the Boyles law (Gas Law). He separated chemistry from alchemy and gave the first precise definition of a chemical element, a chemical reaction and chemical analysis.