

## Editorial Note

This issue of the *Marxist* is dedicated to commemorate the birth centenary of the foremost Indian Marxist philosopher, **Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya**, born on November 19, 1918 and passed away on May 8, 1993.

His explorations on various currents in ancient Indian philosophy brought forth the hitherto suppressed trends of materialist outlook that constantly battled the ideologicistic/spiritual trends. He pioneered the work on the history of science, technology and scientific methods in ancient India and its links to the philosophical traditions. He, thus, laid down a methodology to study the materialist basis of Indian philosophy.

Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya grew with two major passions in his life – Indian philosophy and politics. In both these fields, he progressed towards radical streams developing a life long commitment to Marxism and the Communist movement. During the freedom struggle, he was associated with the Left nationalist movement and joined the Progressive Writers Association that was formed in 1936. Trained academically, acquiring distinction, in philosophy under eminent people, including Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, he served in various distinguished academic capacities. His work on the materialist basis of Indian philosophy and the history of science and scientific methods received global acclaim and he collaborated with some of the outstanding western scholars of 20th century like Joseph Needham, George Thomson, amongst others, and was a fellow of the German and USSR academies of sciences.

As the first article in this issue, we are reproducing an article written by **EMS Namboodiripad**, former General Secretary of the CPI(M), soon after Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya's passing away, in the April-June 1993 issue of the *Marxist*. This is relevant to the contemporary struggles that we are currently engaged in, in India. EMS says that Debiprasad "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". This article reviews some of the major works of Chattopadhyaya.

The forces of superstition, obscurantism and communal divisiveness have created a monster in our national politics. This constitutes a serious threat to national unity, preservation of freedom, development of democracy and the advance of progressive socio-cultural forces. EMS concludes this discussion by saying: "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."

Though written sixteen years ago, this is a grim reminder of the battles that we are today engaged in and the forces over which the working class movement has to triumph.

**Dr. Ramkrishna Bhattacharya** discusses the devotion with which Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya worked during his last years of life exploring the history of science and technology in ancient India. Discussing why Chattopadhyaya changed the focus of his research from philosophy to the history of science, Dr. Bhattacharya concludes that "it is philosophy that led him to the history of science", and that he forged a close link between philosophical doctrines and scientific ideas that emerged in India over time. "Instead of cataloguing all the wonderful discoveries

and spectacular inventions made by ancient Indian scientists, he emphasized the unity of head and hand, thought and action, theory and practice.”

Thus, “what is original in Chattopadhyaya is his penchant for linking philosophy to science on the basis of both philosophical and scientific texts. His intensive study of the two compendia of medicine and surgery in India provided him with a new insight into the working of the Indian social system. The custodians of the society demanded and successfully extorted the submission of science to credo. Such an enforced submission is epitomized in the faith in the infallibility of the Vedas. It was this subjection that led to the decline of science. This was a unique approach to the history of science and technology.”

**Dr. Arunabha Misra** presents a brief overview of Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya’s life and work. Chattopadhyaya’s first venture in employing Marxist method and understanding in ancient Indian philosophy resulted in his first major work *Lokayata*. *Lokayata* means materialist philosophy. It also stand for people’s philosophy. He shows how Chattopadhyaya’s work contributed to the understanding of ancient Indian philosophy, thought, scientific knowledge and technological advances, and concludes that these were “sustained by pluralism of ideas. That is what constituted its strength. The cacophony that is trying to strait-jacket Indian thought in the name of religion is damaging the very civilization in the name of which it seeks to speak. Debiprasad’s work was motivated to overturn the existing popular consciousness of Indian philosophical thought.”

Dr. Misra concludes by saying: “The forces of orthodox *Hindutva vaad* with fangs of old *Varnashrama* and *Vedanta philosophy* are now trying to dominate socio-cultural and political atmosphere of India. Inculcation of findings of Debiprasad may help us a lot at this critical juncture to uphold idea of united secular and modern forward looking India.”

In lieu of a document from different Communist and Workers

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Parties of the world, that we usually reproduce, as the final piece for discussion in the *Marxist*, we are reproducing an address by Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya that remained unpublished for a long time, delivered to inaugurate a conference of the Marxist Education Society, Andhra Pradesh, held at Hyderabad in September 1974. Though this may appear dated, Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya's discussion on the "Ideological struggle of India today", is of immense relevance to the current struggles that are taking place in our country. Saying that we can no longer afford to remain indifferent to the ideological struggles in India, Chattopadhyaya begins his address by borrowing Marx's expression, viz., "to settle accounts with our erstwhile philosophical conscience".

Hence, Chattopadhyaya continues to say: "To come to terms with our philosophical past which hangs so heavily on us is a task which is more than ease and safety suggest. It requires a great deal of fearless zeal for truth, which hardly exists outside the working-class movement inspired by Marxism. Without Marxism, we have neither the perspective nor the moral courage for our own ideological struggle today. At the same time, the Indian working-class movement, which is the ultimate guarantee for the success of the Indian ideological struggle, requires, for its own growing strength, the seriousness and the dedication of this ideological struggle itself. The two, in other words, are dialectically interrelated between the struggle of the working class and the struggle in philosophy. "As philosophy", says he, "finds its material weapon in the proletariat, so the proletariat finds its spiritual weapon in philosophy. The emancipation of the German proletariat is the emancipation of man. The head of this emancipation is philosophy, its heart is the proletariat. Philosophy cannot be made a reality without the abolition of the proletariat, the proletariat cannot be abolished without philosophy being made a reality."

Chattopadhyaya ends this discussion by saying: "An objective analysis of the Indian philosophical activity drew its nourishment

from the clash of ideas, or, in Indian terminology, from the active confrontation of *paksa* and *vipaksa* - literally the thesis and the antithesis. Therefore, our first question for the understanding of the Indian philosophical situation as a whole is the question concerning the basic contradiction in it. This contradiction, as an objective analysis shows, is the contradiction of basically two trends: of irrationalism, obscurantism and religion-oriented idealism. The other of these is that of rationalism, secularism and science-orientation gravitating inevitably towards the materialist outlook. In traditional India - mainly because of the pressure of the vested interests and their spokesmen, the Indian law-givers - the first of these received a tremendous boosting, political patronage and financial support. This accounts for the usual picture of Indian philosophy with a highly inflated importance of this trend. Further, the representatives of the second trend had to struggle against the adverse historical conditions of economic under-development, social stagnation and stunted technology and science. In these circumstances it was not historically possible for the representatives of this trend to carry forward its potential beyond a certain point. Since this trend, however, represents what is actually living in the Indian philosophical tradition, its potential remains to be carried forward to their real culmination. This means the task of inheriting this trend and of nourishing it with contemporary knowledge and experience. But who is it that can really do this? Not the Indian landed aristocracy, not even the Indian bourgeoisie, for beyond a certain limit this task militates against their basic class interests. Rationalism, for example, if fully implemented among the people, enables the people to see what is going on beneath the surface of the social reality. From the point of view of the other classes, the risk in this is obvious. .... Modern revivalism and reaction is taking full advantage of this and, in doing this, is wanting to reinvoke imperialism. The hope lies only in the working-class movement, which alone has the boldness and the courage to inherit what

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is best in the Indian philosophical tradition and to carry this forward to its real fulfillment.”

We hope that this volume will add the needed philosophical and scientific inputs to triumph in the current ‘battle of ideas’ that is taking place in our country.