

Radhakamal Mukerjee



Radhakamal Mukerjee (1889-1968) along with D.P. Mukerji - his colleague in Lucknow University - and G.S. Ghurye of Bombay University, are considered a great pioneer in sociology in India. Lucknow University was a major centre of sociology and social anthropology. Under the scholarship of the triumvirate - Radhakamal Mukerjee, D.P. Mukerji and D.N. Majumdar - Lucknow soon emerged as a leading centre for social science studies and it remained so until the mid-1960s. Our discussion here is mainly on Radhakamal Mukerjee.

Life Sketch

Radhakamal Mukerjee was born on 7th December in 1889 in a large Bengali Brahmin family at Berhampur (Murshidabad), a small country-town in Western Bengal. He spent the first sixteen years of his life in this town. His father was a lawyer and the leader of the bar. He was an accomplished scholar with a great interest in history.

Punjab. He went back to the University of Calcutta where Asutosh Mookerji had established the Post Graduate Council of Arts and Science in 1917. He stayed there for five years and taught economics, sociology and political philosophy. He was awarded the Premchand Raychand Scholarship in 1915 and PhD degree in 1920 (Calcutta University) on his study of "Socio-Economic Change in the Indian Rural Community". In 1921, he joined the University of Lucknow as Professor and Head of the Department of Economics and Sociology on the very day when the university started functioning. He introduced an integrated approach in economics, sociology and anthropology in both research and teaching in Lucknow University. He taught economics and sociology in Lucknow University for nearly thirty years upto 1952. He was Economic Advisor of the Gwalior State Government from 1945 to 1947 and Vice-Chancellor of the Lucknow University from 1955 to 1957. In 1958, he became Director of the J.K. Institute of Sociology and Human Relation of the Lucknow University. Thus, he stayed at Lucknow until his death, with interludes at the universities of Patna, Calcutta and Delhi, from 1925 to 1940.

Mukerjee also visited the universities of Cambridge, Oxford, Cologne, Vienna, Harvard, Columbia, Chicago, Michigan and Wisconsin for delivering lectures in economics and sociology in 1937, 1946 and 1948. He was nominated Chairman, Economics and Statistics Commission of the FAO at Copenhagen in 1946, a member of the Indian delegation to consider proposals for World Food Council, Washington in 1947, and as a member of the Technical Committee of the ILO for recommending names of countries for seats on its governing body. He served as a member of various committees appointed by the Government of Uttar Pradesh and the Union Government.

Theoretical Formulation

According to Ramkrishna Mukherjee (1979), since human institutions form an integral part of the individual, society and values,

question of values. Social sciences give us knowledge and this knowledge is to be employed for the betterment or good of the world. We must develop a sense of values. Mukerjee's great ambition was to work for a better social order."

A predilection towards metaphysics and the "idealistic" however was noticed in Mukerjee's earlier writings such as

1. The Three Ways: The Way of Transcendentalist-Religion and Social Norm (1929)

2. Sociology and Mysticism (1931)

3. The Theory and Art of Mysticism (1937)

Mukerjee's other important writings are as follows:

1. The Foundations of Indian Economics (1916)

2. The Rural Economy of India (1926)

3. Regional Sociology (1926)

4. The Land Problems of India (1927)

5. Introduction of Social Psychology (1928)

6. Field and Farmers of Oudh (1929)

7. Regional Balance of Man (1938)

8. Man and his Habitation (1940)

9. The Institutional Theory of Economics (1940)

10. Indian Working Class (1945)

11. The Social Structure of Values (1949)

12. The Dynamics of Morals: A Socio-Psychological Theory of Ethics (1950)

13. Inter-caste Tensions (Co-author) (1951)

14. Races, Lands and Food (1946)

15. The Social Function of Art (1948)

16. The Social Structure of Values (1949)

17. A General Theory of Society (1956)

18. The Philosophy of Social Science (1960)

19. Social Profiles of a Metropolis (1963)

20. The Dimensions of Human Values (1964)

21. The Destiny of Civilization (1964)

22. Flowering of Indian Art (1964)

23. District Town in Transition: Social and Economic Survey of Gorakhpur (with B. Singh) (1964)

any consideration of social facts without their value component is unreal; instead, there should be a fusion of 'empirical' and 'normative' sociology, therefore, development of man is possible through commonality and cooperation in a free society, and not through contradiction and conflict.

Radhakamal Mukerjee's vision of sociology, though rooted in the Indian tradition, was still universalistic. He saw the possibility of developing a general theory of sociology based on a social action theory. In the Indian case this theory would be derived from Indian philosophy and tradition.

Methodology

Beginning with the structural-functional approach to ascertain the interdependence between the economic sphere and the socio-historical-cultural order of Indian society, Mukerjee's 'transdisciplinary' approach was to be used for a comprehensive appraisal of social reality in the Indian world context. Mukerjee also suggested for the use of comparative methods in the study of social sciences in India. He said: "We must aim at the scientific study of the race and culture origins."

Inspired by Seal to investigate reality in the specific context of India, by Geddes to unfold in its empirical details, and in the light of his basic training in economics, Mukerjee began his research career with field investigations and bibliographical research in economic sociology and human ecology. He sustained his interest in empirical field investigations and throughout his life encouraged his students in this respect.

However, in course of time, Mukerjee empiricism became multidimensional, centred around the conceptualization of human institutions as forming an invisible unity made up of the individual society and values.

Having received initial training in economics, Radhakamal Mukerjee began with a series of micro-level analyses of problems in economic sociology, such as rural economy and land problems (1926, 1927), population problems (1938), and the problems of the Indian working class (1945). In the late 1920s, when the great depression had set in, he initiated a number of micro-level inquiries into the

Biological Evolution

The biological evolution of human being has facilitated the rise and development of civilization. They have the capacity to change the environment as an active agent. The animals can only adapt to an environment, but human beings can mould it in different ways. The human beings, as biological species, are capable of overcoming competition and conflict and attain cooperation (symbiosis).

Universalization

In social psychology, people are often depicted within the framework of race, ethnicity or nationhood. Human beings are seen as prisoners of little selves or egos, whose attitudes are parochial or ethnocentric. On the contrary, human beings have potentiality to overcome the narrow feelings and attain *universalization*, that is, to identify oneself with the larger collectivity such as one's nation or even as a member of the universe itself. In the process, common values help to subordinate the particularistic values to universal values. To Mukerjee, *ethical relativism*, which means that values vary from society to society, is not helpful in the present times. There is a need for ethical universalism, which affirms the unity of the mankind. In the new perspective, men and women become free moral agents who are capable of recognizing the common strands binding the humanity. They are no longer dictated by divisiveness or relativity.

Spiritual Dimension

Mukerjee views that the civilization has a spiritual dimension. Human beings are gradually scaling transcendental heights. It means that they are moving up to the ladder of spirituality by overcoming the constraints of biogenic and existential levels, i.e., the physical and material limitations. In this endeavour, art, myth and religion provide the 'impulsion' or the force to move upward. As the social sciences have hitherto ignored these cultural elements, they are capable of providing a spiritual perspective. To Mukerjee, humankind's search for unity, wholeness and transcendence highlights the spirituality of civilization. In this respect, he

Indian... impressed by the largely non-aggressive nature of Indian religions like Hinduism, Buddhism or Jainism. The spirit of tolerance and diversities is reflected also in *Dharamashastras*. These codes are flexible enough to accommodate ethnic diversities of communities. Emphasis on the ultimate truth, rather than on a particular set of beliefs or rituals, has been a constant feature of Indian religions. It is through the peaceful agency of religion that the Indian culture and civilization spread beyond the natural geographic limits of India to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and countries in the southeast. Therefore, Indian influences spread to many countries not through war or conquest but through friendship and goodwill.

Theory of Society

Radhakamal Mukerjee emphasized interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approach towards the understanding of human life. He sought to develop a general theory of society. To achieve this, first, he proposed to break the barriers between physical and natural sciences and sciences relating to man's social and psychological aspects. Secondly, the compartmentalization of social sciences like economics, sociology and psychology should also be avoided. There should be constant interaction among various social sciences. Mutual exchange of ideas between physical and natural sciences is necessary to adequately appreciate the multiple dimensions of human personality and its interaction with the natural environment and social environment.

Concept of Universal Civilization

Mukerjee's general theory of society seeks to explain the values of universal civilization. He used the term 'civilization' in an inclusive sense; culture is part of it. He proposes that human civilization should be studied at three interrelated levels. These are:

1. Biological evolution
2. Universalization

24. *The Oneness of Mankind* (1965)
25. *The Way of Humanism: East and West* (1968)
26. *Social Sciences and Planning in India* (1970).

We would like to discuss here the following major issues, which we find worthwhile in the writings of Mukerjee:

1. Indian culture and civilization
2. Theory of society
3. Concept of universal civilization
4. Economic transactions and social behaviour
5. Personality, society and values
6. The community of communities
7. Urban social problems
8. Social ecology

Indian Culture and Civilization

Mukerjee (1964) writes extensively on Indian art and architecture, history and culture. He believes that Asiatic art aimed at collective developments. According to him, harmony is the basic value of life. He found this harmony amply illustrated in the Indian scheme of life of previous ages. Indian culture has viewed man as a responsible member of a community. Man is not isolated individual. In this context, Mukerjee writes: "Art in Asia became the torch bearer of social and spiritual upheavals for millions.... Oriental art is most intensively charged with community feeling and is thus chiefly responsible for the historical continuity of Oriental cultures." In contrast, such artistic endeavour in the West had been dominated either by individualism or feeling that art was an end in itself. This was just not conducive to either social solidarity or spiritual development.

Indian art is embedded in social or ethical sphere. Mukerjee writes: "The myriad temples, *stupas* and *viharas* of India bear witness to the link between art and ethics, religious and social values. Art in India is an enduring component of people's interaction with each other which shows in concrete forms the active relationship between people's aspirations and their artistic creativity."

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commended the Indian and Chinese civilizations, which had endured as stable entities since 6th century BC. Their strength is derived from their universal myths and values which foster spiritual quest.

Economic Transactions and Social Behaviour

Too much of specialization in a particular discipline may give only a one-sided or partial view of man's existence and behaviour. In his *Institutional Theory of Economics*, Mukerjee has shown that Indian western economics and that mostly neglected the traditional caste network in indigenous business, handicrafts and banking. It viewed economic development mainly as an extension of monetary economics or market phenomenon. The western model in economics focused on the market and industrial centres.

In a country like India, where a large number of economic transactions take place within the framework of caste or tribe, the market model has only a limited relevance. Economic exchange in the Indian setting has been influenced by traditional networks. The guilds and castes of India have been operating in a non-competitive system. The rules of economic exchange were largely derived from the norms of social or collective living. Interdependence or non-competition between groups has been emphasized in the norms of Indian tradition. They have not stressed promotion of self-interest but highlighted fulfilment of the well-being of the community as the proper goal of human life.

The economic values in India should be understood with reference to social norms. Sheer biological or physical drives do not generate economic transactions. Religious or ethical constraints have always given a direction to economic activities. Values enter into the daily life of people and compel them to act in collectively sanctioned ways. For example, a hungry upper caste Hindu would not eat beef; likewise, an orthodox Muslim or Jew would not eat pork, however, urgent may be the need for food. Therefore, it is wrong to always treat economic behaviour as separate from social life or collectivity.

- (3) In 'society' or 'community', equity and justice find expression.
- (4) In 'general', the chief values are 'spontaneous love', and co-cooperativeness. These values are necessary for the reconstruction of the world. In short, Mukerjee deals with values in several contexts.

Values are always accompanied by disvalues. Disvalues are both due to individual's lags and social shortcomings. The disvalues are expressed not only in individual deviance but also in institutional deviance (criminal gangs, etc.). Mukerjee emphasizes the treatment of disvalues. He would reintegrate deviant individuals and groups by working on the total social situation and on the social adaptability of persons and groups.

In two of his works, *The Dynamics of Morals* and *The Dimensions of Human Values*, Mukerjee discusses ethics from a philosophical perspective. He refers to man's need to transcend selfishness and attain a universal brotherhood. The movement towards transcendence becomes almost an inevitable development. This is especially true in a world, which is ridden with violence and discord.

The Community of Communities

In *The Dimensions of Human Evolution: A Bio-Philosophical Interpretation*, Mukerjee explored the creative, integrating and harmonizing principles of life, mind and society in evolutionary successive dimensions, while in both *The Philosophy of Personality* and *The Dimensions of Values: A Unified Theory*, he has stressed the interpersonal nature of human existence and transcendence, and the unity, mutual involvement and fusion of all values and possibilities.

The book on *The Community of Communities* endeavours to use and develop the same contemporary seminal idea of the open human person-in-communication for the understanding and interpretation of human communion and community. Human personhood, values and community are all unities and transcendences.

Normally, man never expands his cosmos and its resources for the deepening, enrichment and expansion of life, values and

social culture.

- Thirdly, the notion of rational and atomized individual creates the artificial division between empirical sociology and ethics or metaphysics. Empirical sociological studies social structure and function through the method of natural science and ethics studies values. The dichotomy of the two in western social sciences gives the wrong impression that values cannot be studied objectively.

According to Mukerjee, the distinction between values and measurable facts is false. Values and valuations can be verified and validated in the social process. It is borne by three postulates:

- First, values play an important part in the integration and fulfilment of man's basic impulses and desires in a stable and consistent manner. It means that the selfish desires and interests are modified by collective living, where people give and take from each other.
- Secondly, values are generic in scope and are made up of both individual and social responses and attitudes. Values become shared by all through their symbolization. Symbols are condensed or epitomized expressions of commonly shared values. The national flag, for example, is a common symbol that constitutes a nation.
- Thirdly, despite the diversity and divergence of values of different peoples, and cultures, some universal values are discernible.

A gradation of values is found on four levels of social integration:

- (1) In the crowd there is a spontaneous, although brutal, expression of value - e.g., moral indignation, etc., directed against individuals and institutions.
- (2) In the economic interest group...

generate subjective preferences, standards and aspirations." Values help man in orienting his desires and goals in a set pattern. Thus man resolves the inner tensions or conflicts of imperious biological drives. Besides this, he succeeds in achieving harmonious social roles and orderly relations with his fellow men with the help of appropriate values.

The concept of value cuts across desires, goals, ideals and norms. Desires in social action are goals. The ideal is constructed in a hypothetical social situation characterized by the conflict of goals. Norms are arbiters of opposing or contradicting ideals. They connote a beyond-human, teleological order of the universe. They relationships are defined by Mukerjee as attitudes and behaviours of men towards one another as presented by their common goals and values. Groups are, according to Mukerjee, orderly social relationships and behaviours of associated persons that emerge out of the integration and fulfilment of their common goals and values. Institutions are more enduring than groups. Institutions are defined as more organized formal and enduring social relationships that fulfil certain common and stable goals and values of persons.

Position refers to the individual's capacity and achievement in the specific status within the institutional set-up. The institutional network of a society provides the matrix where multiple roles become complementary and facilitate the fulfilment and integration of the goals and values of society and personality.

The basic problem for modern societies is to create and nurture values which will lead to full development and expression of human individuality on the one hand and the generality of harmony order and solidarity on the other.

The social sciences as developed in the West propounded metaphysical individualism:

- First, it makes the mistake of isolating man and his atomic desires and preferences from his total group and institutional situation.
- Secondly, the atomism and rationalism of the social sciences have ignored the vast sector of human values that are sharable rather than competitive, integral rather than partial, and that

Personality, Society and Values

In his book *Personality*, Radhakamal views personality of individual as an agent, who takes decisions and makes choices, and seeks value-fulfilment. Man makes choices and acts in terms of values relating to (i) self, (ii) the other, and (iii) cosmos.

Individual man is, of course, subjected to two kinds of influences. On the one hand, there are the influences of nature, environment and biological drives and needs. Add to them are man's psychological impulses. On the other hand, there is the pressure of society or collectivity. Human personality is greatly influenced by these two influences. But, it is not determined by them. Human personality has the quality of transcending both kinds of pressures. It can even transcend itself. Indeed, personality is defined by Mukerjee as "the sum total of the individual's characteristic mode of adjustment at different dimensions: (i) biological, (ii) social, and (iii) ideal, cosmic or transcendent". The human personality transacts with the environment as a biological and social creature. But, it is something more than that. It is "the psycho-social whole responsive to the cosmic whole". According to Mukerjee, "personality essentially is transcendence". Personality of a man or woman has a social dimension. But, he/she may want isolation from his/her fellow beings in order to establish a communion between himself/ herself and the cosmos. He/she may require freedom from social pressures to realize the freedom of his/her inner self. The function of the society and its value system lies in facilitating the development of personality which would be a free agent.

Society is, according to Radhakamal, "the sum of structures and functions through which man orients himself to the three dimensions or levels of his environment: (a) ecologic, (b) psycho-social, and (c) moral". Thus, society "fulfils the basic requirements of sustenance status and value-fulfilment".

Values

Values are "socially approved desires or goals that are internalized through the process of conditioning and socialization. They

against it. He strongly advocated for conservation of forests and protection of ecological balance.

Mindless urbanization was also lamented by Mukerjee. From the ecological point of view he upheld the idea and process of urbanization. Urban development at the expense of the countryside should be kept in check. Agriculture should be diversified and industries should be decentralized.

Mukerjee notices with concern that (i) overgrazing and (ii) improvident destruction of trees and scrubs, and (iii) intensive method of cultivation bring about a serious imbalance in the biophysical constitution of the entire region. It seriously impacts the nature's cycle. Removal of vegetation brings about a chain of unfavourable reactions such as (1) denudation of the top soil, (2) fall in the underground water level, (3) diminution of rainfall, (4) increase of aridity, and (5) acceleration of 'river', sheet or gully and wind erosion. These have led to serious and continuous agricultural deterioration.

Industrial civilization, because of its mindless exploitation of natural resources, finds its "security threatened due to the exhaustion of coal and petroleum" and the diminishing supply of minerals and vitamins, which cannot be synthetically manufactured. The importance of ecological values can hardly be overemphasized even in the industrial society. Of course, there is no need for loss of nerves. Man's success in his adaptation to the geographical environment rests on certain ideal values, which have their roots in ecological values. But it is necessary that these values should "have reached the level of standards of moral behaviour".

Conclusion

It may be viewed from the above analysis that Radhakamal Mukerjee advocated a methodology reflecting the organic interdependence between the economic sphere and the entire socio-historical cultural order [see, e.g., *A General Theory of Society* (1956); *The Philosophy of Social Sciences* (1968)]. He proposed, therefore, a transdisciplinary approach to social research at a time when some social scientists in India were considering the need for interdisciplinary research.

In his book, *Regional Sociology* (1926), Mukerjee explains the scope of human ecology "as a synoptic study of the balance of plant, animal and human communities, which are systems of correlated working parts in the organization of the region". American pioneers in ecological studies did not give adequate attention to the factor of culture in their conception of ecological relations. They viewed such relations as similar to those which take place among plants and animals. Mukerjee argued that ecological relations among human beings are largely similar with those among lower organisms. But, in case of human beings, cultural norms have a very important role. Human ecology highlights this fact. In the formation of an ecologic unit like 'region' social habits, values and traditions become very important. Individuals having the same or similar values possess solidarity. The ecological standpoint in which man's constant strivings, aspirations and ideals mingle silently with the ecological forces and processes. Social ecology stresses the ever complex give-and-take relationship between man and the region.

There is a definite link between ecology and society. The development of ecological zones is the outcome of a dynamic process that is the challenge of the environment and the response of the people who establish a settlement. Ecological balance is not achieved by a mechanical carving out of a territory and setting people therein. Such an attempt weakens or destroys the social fabric. For example, in building industrial plants or constructing irrigation plants or constricting irrigation dams in India, very often, people of the concerned locations are moved to new settlements. It seriously affects community's life of the people. As a people lives in an area, it develops a symbiotic relationship with the ecology or environment of the area. In the new situation it may fail to develop that kind of relationship with the surrounding.

Mukerjee's ideas about social ecology advocated regional development. He stood for a balance between economic growth and ecological fitness. Traditional crafts and skills like weaving or engraving should be revamped for attaining economic growth of a region without any great damage to its ecology. Deforestation has created havoc. Long back Mukerjee cautioned his countrymen

community in a continuously creative, transcending process of evolution. The philosophy of community envisions it as the pattern of "one cosmos, one community". This widens the prospects of human evolution for both individuals and species within an overall unity of world science, communication and civilization. In this context, the philosophy of community means a profound study of the unforeseeable role of man in and with community and cosmos, of the values and potentialities of *Homo universalis*.

The meaning of community in evolution varies at the level of following dimensions:

1. Biological
2. Psychological
3. Moral
4. Philosophical
5. Metaphysical

At the biological dimension the true community comprises the entire species of *Homo sapiens* which guides and directs the psychozoic phase of evolution through human values and culture. At the psychological dimension the true community rests on man's self-extension and transcendence or transformation of *Homo sapiens* into *Homo universalis*, who consecrates himself to the infinite values and possibilities of both himself and the community for self-fulfilment and self-expression. At the moral dimension the true community grounds itself in man's vital communion with his fellow men, belonging to all races and continents. At the philosophical dimension the true community embodies faith in the vital principles of inner harmony and organic unity of mankind and cosmos and of the order, wholeness and togetherness of existence. Finally, at the metaphysical dimension, the true community realizes the truth of identity between the self and the Universal Other or the Community of Communities of which human love is capable, and embodies this truth in every goal and striving of human life in all interpersonal relations and values.

Contemporary man's history should strengthen his evolutionary trend by enlarging his communication and communion and

on their own merit; that is, irrespective of the theoretical underpinning to these efforts and achievements of Radhakamal. But his advocacy of 'institutional planning' was not so readily accepted. As we live in a lunar world, where light is reflected from the sun rising in the West, the social scientists became vocal about institutional planning after Gunnar Myrdal posed it (1971) in terms of transplantation of the 'modernizing ideals' from the First (and the Second) to the Third World.

In his last years, Mukerjee postulated the need for a fusion of 'empirical' and 'normative' sociology in order that social engineering will have its disposal reliable knowledge concerning human behaviour, goals and values as well as means and techniques of analysis and feasible devices for social control [see, e.g., *A Philosophical View of Civilization* (1963); *The Oneness of Mankind* (1965)]. Although, his last writings were somewhat speculative in nature, however, he is distinguished among the pioneers of Indian sociology as one who clearly specified his factual foundations, arguments and proposals regarding what Indian sociology was in his time and how it should develop.

Mukerjee did not give adequate importance to the part played by conflicts in actual social life. He upheld the cause of harmony between man and man, one nation and another, between different regions, between human groupings and biological environment. His stress on the importance of values of understanding and tolerance, moral responsibility of the individual to the community and human responsibility for protecting ecology would be considered very important by the students of sociology, even today.

That intellectual freedom is a precondition for an advancement of science and of the frontiers of knowledge was the basic faith of the founding fathers of Indian sociology and social anthropology. This explains why, despite their own preferences for certain perspectives and methodologies, their students could contribute appreciably to the development of alternative conceptual framework for studying Indian society - its structure and change in the post-1950 period.

Mukerjee has pioneered three approaches to social science for which he would always be remembered:

1. Conceiving economics as a specialization, and not as a discipline, in the realm of social science.
2. Introducing the 'institutional approach' to planning which should not be regarded as the exclusive prerogative of the economists but should be treated under the rubric of social science.
3. Raising the sight of appraisal of social reality from the *unidisciplinary* or *interdisciplinary* outlook of the social scientists to a *transdisciplinary* perspective, bearing in mind the common acceptance of the term 'social sciences' comprising various 'disciplines' like economics, political science, psychology, and sociology and so on.

Mukerjee started his career as an economist who, in those days, defined the framework of reference to the 'discipline' as the relation between man and his exploitation of the natural resources in successively compounded forms. At that time, the Marxists had raised the issue, but they were not seriously considered by the establishment of economics. Mukerjee was not a Marxist, but he clearly conceived economics as dealing with the relationship among humans with respect to the exploitation of natural resources and the consequent production and appropriation of material goods and services.

In his voluminous writing in this context, Mukerjee examined the nexus of human relationships in the totality of life and living. But that was transcending the boundary of economics as a discipline, which he regarded as a specialization within the unitary discipline of social science. This viewpoint was not acceptable to the contemporaneous mandarins in the 'economic' science; nor was Mukerjee acceptable to the contemporaneous mandarins of sociology or any other social science 'discipline'. Therefore, Mukerjee became a *bratya*, a marginal man in the realm of social science.

Mukerjee's empirical studies on various aspects of the problem, working class, town and village more and more appreciated