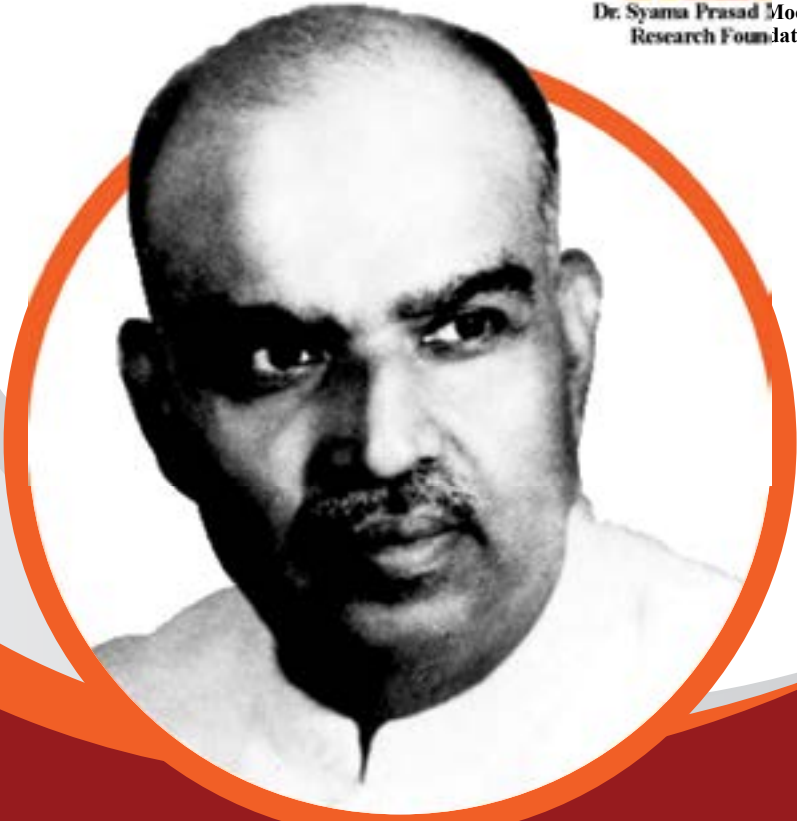




Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee
Research Foundation



Tribute to

**Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee:
a Selfless Patriot**

by

Dr. Anirban Ganguly

With farsightedness, Syama Prasad called to link education and industry

The Interest in the life and times of Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee is increasing by the day. Not only the fortnight between his birth and death—June 23 (1953), the day he died in mysterious circumstances in Srinagar, and his birth anniversary falling on July 6 (1901)—but throughout the year there is an increasing interest, especially among youth.

What is fascinating about his life is that despite being short, it had so many dimensions. In each of these areas of human action, Syama Prasad excelled. Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a rich and profound tribute to him on June 23, while speaking in Madhya Pradesh, spoke of three cornerstones in the life of Syama Prasad—he referred to ‘vidya (education), vitta (finance/economy), vikas’.

Indeed, Syama Prasad’s life revolved around these. The first station of his working life, in which he excelled, was as the youngest vice-chancellor of the University of Calcutta at the age of 33. As V-C, Syama Prasad initiated a number of reforms and changes in the university, focused on the growth of Indian languages, on scientific training, agricultural education, research in Indian history and civilisational studies, initiated Chinese and Buddhist studies and invited Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore to deliver the convocation address in Bengali—for the first time in the history of the university or British India.

Even in later years, Syama Prasad continued to have a close interest and association with leading educational and research institutions in the country such as the Indian Institute of Science in Bengaluru, among others. His convocation addresses delivered to universities across the country from 1930s to 1952 are full of deep thought and wisdom. Syama Prasad advocated innovation and autonomy in higher education, insisted on the need for original research, and argued that each university should

develop its own areas of focus.

His call to strengthen primary and higher education, his call for the need to link education and industry are dimensions which continue to be relevant today. His formidable reputation as an educationist and an uncompromising nationalist, led the Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Puducherry select him as the chairman of the Sri Aurobindo Memorial Convention, held in April 1951 to establish a university that would perpetuate and disseminate the vision of Sri Aurobindo while imparting and implementing a new vision of education.

Syama Prasad's administrative acumen and political sagacity came to the fore when he assumed charge as Finance (vitta) Minister of Bengal, deftly balancing a coalition government with the Muslim-dominated Krishak Praja Party, and astutely keeping the Muslim League at bay and neutralising its capacity to inject the poison of communal politics, handling the colonial administration bent on trying to sabotage or wreck the experiment and all the while effectively carrying out his administrative duties.

His vision for vikas was best seen in his role as free India's first minister for industry and supply from 1947 to 1950. This was the period when he worked to lay India's industrial foundation. The first industrial policy of independent India laid out in 1948 'reflected his ideas and vision'. His goal as minister was to ensure that in basic industry and infrastructure India must become self-reliant. Syama Prasad wanted India to develop big industry as well as focus on MSMEs, cottage industries, handloom and textile. His tenure as industry minister saw the laying down of the foundation of cottage and small-scale industries.

In all his actions, he was inspired and directed by one overweening and unshakable impulse—that of seeing India become once more great, self-reliant and conscious of her strength and and civilisational wisdom.

<http://www.anirbanganguly.in/2018/07/01/with-farsightedness-syama-prasad-called-to-link-education-and-industry/>

A Great and Passionate Love for Bharatmata – tribute to Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee

In his tribute to Syama Prasad Mookerjee, one of the tallest leaders of modern India, Acharya J.B.Kripalani, expressed and articulated the emotions of millions of his countrymen when he movingly wrote, 'I wish to record the great and passionate love that he had for Bharatmata and her unity. Only political diehards can deny this. It was this passionate love for his country that made him resign his seat in the Bengal Cabinet in 1942 as a protest against the cruel repression of a foreign government. It was this love that again made him resign his seat in the Central Cabinet under the first Congress government in free India, on the issue of the treatment of Hindus in Pakistan and their exodus to India. It was, I believe, the love for the unity of India that made him participate in the Jammu agitation which unfortunately cost him his life and deprived the nation of his services.'

It was this 'great and passionate love' for Bharatmata that essentially defined Syama Prasad's public life and unfailingly propelled his actions. It is only the 'political diehards', for whom the term and vision of 'India's national interest' is non-existent, who have consistently worked to suppress, misrepresent or create a cleverly crafted miasma of falsehood around Syama Prasad's legacy and life.

From the beyond passage of time, of decades and of our collective memory, Syama Prasad still stands out as a sentinel against that mindset which seeks to dissolve and dilute the essential and civilisational vision of our existence as a nation and a people. Each time therefore his legacy is reiterated, every time he is invoked, whenever attempts have been made to seriously examine the many facets of his life these 'political diehards' have always rallied around pounding their maces of falsehood. Prominent among these today are the worshippers and propitiators of a crass culture

of vote-bank politics.

For Syama Prasad, as he himself once described it, 'separatism and constriction' are both banes of our national life and have therefore to be resisted, opposed and arrested. It was this driving philosophy that saw him take positions which now in hindsight only prove his prescience and foresight – qualities that only perhaps Sardar Patel and a few other leaders of that era demonstrated in great measure.

To those who came in touch with him and worked with him either in their political, official and educational capacities, Syama Prasad was the leader – exuding a deep insight and attention for details, an indefatigable energy for sustained work and application, a deep understanding of human issues and political problems, Syama Prasad endeared himself to people cutting across divides and ideologies. As one of his associates observed, 'unlike most ambitious men, he had a very warm heart for his friends – in fact, for anyone in distress.' It was these qualities combined with a deep connect with his people that led him to undertake the huge famine relief initiative during the genocidal Bengal famine of 1943. When comrades and collaborators were busy spinning tales, subverting and trying to douse the final conflagration of our fight to freedom, Syama Prasad resigned his seat in the Bengal cabinet and plunged wholeheartedly in this final struggle. 'His patriotic mind', noted Asutosh Lahiry a towering nationalist leader, 'revolted against the manner the 'Quit India' movement was being suppressed...unspeakable atrocities were being committed' and Syama Prasad felt 'he could no longer associate himself with an Administration which perpetrated such crimes.' His letter of resignation 'was a historic document, and constituted a scathing indictment of the British administration of the time.'

As the legendary art historian and philosopher O.C. Ganguly (1881-1974) who had worked closely with Syama Prasad in the University of Calcutta wrote, 'his sincere patriotism and championship of the people's causes are illustrated in his work as Minister in the Bengal Cabinet and as Minister of Commerce in the Central Cabinet. He never cared for well-paid offices and posts for realising personal ambition and profit, but

several times resigned from the posts of Minister as soon as he found that he could not support the prevailing cabinet policy, because it happened to go against the interest of the common people.’

A young Deputy Secretary in his ministry at the Centre, for example, observed how ‘his cheering smile and unflinching courtesy had endeared him to all his Officers and men who ungrudgingly worked long hours daily feeling that to be associated with such a man was indeed a great fortune and honour. His clarity of thought could hardly be surpassed and many difficult problems relating to his Ministry he would solve with almost uncanny ease. While his officers and men worked hard for him, he worked even harder so that work in his Ministry may be disposed of promptly.’

Yet it was his continuing connect with his people, his adherence to his commitment which gradually turned Syama Prasad, especially in the last phase of his political life, into a truly pan-Indian leader, one who could challenge the status quo and dare to create a new narrative of national regeneration. In those heady days of Nehruvianism such an act was often seen as fallacious and chimerical by the cautious and calculating.

Perhaps O.C. Ganguly sums best, the life of one he so closely observed, ‘As an eminent educationist, as an ardent champion of Hindu Culture, as a distinguished litterateur, as a passionate and sincere patriot, as a friend and champion of the oppressed and down-trodden, as an able Parliamentarian, as an eloquent orator, as a devoted servant of the people, and, above all, as a Humanist, the name of Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee will go down in the pages history as one of the most distinguished figures that adorned and illuminated the variegated firmament of contemporary India.’

Syama Prasad continues to appeal and inspire those whose life and work revolve around the vision of a sovereign, self-reliant, self-possessed image of India...

<http://www.anirbanganguly.in/2017/07/08/great-passionate-love-bharatmata-tribute-dr-syama-prasad-mookerjee/>

Had Syama Prasad Mookerjee not existed

Delivering a riveting public address in Thiruvananthapuram on the occasion of Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee's martyrdom day on June 23, 2016, BJP president Amit Shah made an interesting observation. He said Dr Mookerjee made three epochal interventions in the history of modern India that altered the trajectory of the flow of national events for good.

The first was his intervention which ruptured Jinnah's plan of greater Pakistan and the retaining of Calcutta and West Bengal in India as a place where the Bengali Hindus could live and also find refuge after being pushed out of East Pakistan. The second was the formation of Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) as a nationalist alternative to the faction-ridden and Nehru-beholden Congress, which in the early days after Independence, especially after the demise of Sardar Patel, had begun degenerating into a one-man-driven sycophantic conglomerate. The third was Dr Mookerjee's intervention in Kashmir which eventually ensured that the state remained an integral part of the India.

The question thus is had Dr Mookerjee not been there, or had not existed, what would have happened to India? The first of course is self-evident; the entire Bengal and Punjab would have gone to Pakistan. Over the years, jihad would have a larger area from which to breed and spread poison. The Bengali Hindus would have, without a home state, migrated to various parts of the country as a dispossessed people clinging to memories of a homeland and an identity. The Communists and Trinamool Congress would have no space or the luxury to practice their brand of violent and communal politics sans West Bengal.

Dr Mookerjee's second intervention was when he created BJS, after realising early the dictatorial tendencies of the Congress leadership. "The mistaken policies and 'Abharatiya' and unrealistic approach to the national problems by the party in power," argued the first manifesto of the BJS,

“is primarily responsible for this state of affairs in the country. In their anxiety to make Bharat a carbon-copy of the West, they have ignored and neglected the best in Bharatiya life and ideals. They have failed to harness the enthusiasm created by freedom to the task of realisation of the great potentialities of the country.” Had Dr Mookerjee not created BJS, Congress unilateralism would have dominated; it would have pushed India into a one-party or one-family rule and led to a chaotic situation with increased fissiparous tendencies. Had Dr Mookerjee not initiated this move, Indian democracy would have been poorer, with little options and voices facing an embargo put by a spirit of political intolerance.

Dr Mookerjee’s last intervention was in the affairs of Jammu & Kashmir which, he argued, had to be more completely integrated to ensure India’s well-being and her security and integrity. The sovereignty of Indian Parliament and the Constitution, Dr Mookerjee felt, was to be paramount and the benefit of the Constitution had to reach all citizens. Had he not made this final—and for him fatal because he never emerged out it alive—intervention, the entire state of Jammu & Kashmir would have perhaps gone into the control of those forces who wish to see India fragmented. It would have become the cockpit of terror.

Had Dr Mookerjee not existed, India would have been afflicted with all of these and more. His death and birth anniversaries, thus, offer an occasion to reflect on that question.

<http://www.anirbanganguly.in/2016/07/02/had-syama-prasad-mookerjee-not-existed/>

Why Syama Prasad Mookerjee Is Relevant Today

One of the manifestations of the Nehruvian consensus has been the marginalisation, in our national discourse, of non-Nehruvian or non-Congress leaders, both of thought and of politics. These were the leaders who challenged Nehru's political methods and direction; the ones who dared to evolve an alternative framework for national regeneration by drawing inspiration from the deeper civilisational fountains of Indian experience.

There was a peculiar character trait of the Nehruvian system or state. Those who spoke of a different route of national progress, or those who advocated the need to derive direction and inspiration from our essential civilisational and cultural self, were hardest hit or most severely attacked by the system; their legacies or contributions in independent India largely ignored or shrouded in a mist of obfuscation.

Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee, whose 114th birth anniversary falls on this 6th July, was one such stalwart whose legacy would have long been erased had it not been for the determined struggle waged by the political party he founded in independent India.

Rarely does one come across such versatility and such a multifarious action packed life as Syama Prasad Mookerjee's. And that too a life, that all but spanned fifty-two years, only the last fourteen of which were spent in active politics. Whether it was imparting a new direction to Indian education within the confines of the still-prevailing colonial system; or reaching out to the wider world and inviting its educational institutions to engage with India; or encouraging Indian scholars to undertake excavations and promote the study of Indian history from a liberated Indian perspective; or the setting up of a museum within the University

or encouraging the growth of Bharatiya languages, as the youngest Vice-Chancellor of the University of Calcutta, Syama Prasad, in his tenure, succeeded in giving an altogether refreshing and bold educational path.

While Syama Prasad's father, Asutosh Mookerjee— himself a legendary educationist and juridical icon— going against convention, bestowed on Rabindranath Tagore a doctorate, Syama Prasad invited Tagore in 1937 to deliver the University convocation address in Bengali – the first such invitation in the annals of the University. It was a move that repositioned to some centrality the importance of Indian languages in the cultural and political regeneration of India. A deeply moved Tagore, in his address, referred to how Syama Prasad's father had “carved a channel...through which the Bengali language could flow into” the precincts of the university and how now his ‘worthy son and successor’ had widened that channel for which he deserved the “blessings of his motherland.” In fact, it was such unconventionality, and non-conformism that always characterised Syama Prasad's public action, be it in the field of politics, education or administration.

The sanctions of a colonial system, the stranglehold of the colonial education machinery could never deter him from speaking his mind out on the degradation of India under foreign yoke. Addressing the students of the University of Patna, for example, on their Convocation day sometime in 1937, Syama Prasad, unequivocally described the detrimental effects of foreign rule on our educational direction and priorities. “We must boldly take stock”, he reminded his young audience, “of the things that we have lost and yearn for. We find a general decay of the creative Indian arts which once triumphantly flourished in this land, and produced the frescoes of Ajanta and the Taj of Agra, Indian music, Indian art and architecture, and Indian literature...We witness the decline and disappearance of the indigenous industries of India which mainly thrived in her own towns

and villages. Such cottage industries, if they are to be revived, developed and saved from foreign competition require the unstinted support of the state. We find also deplorable neglect of the health and welfare of the villages of India which are today but shadows of their former affluence and happiness. Indeed much of India's poverty and distress is traced to systematic pursuit of an economic and industrial policy which has not been prompted and administered in the sole interest of India and her inhabitants."

His concern for evolving a wide base of research on civilisational subjects that would aid in articulating the Indian narrative saw forceful reiteration years later in independent India.

Addressing the students and faculty of Delhi University in 1952, perhaps his last educational address, Syama Prasad broached an agenda which would remain largely unfulfilled or adversely addressed in the decades that followed. In this articulation of his comes his essential self and world-view, that of an educationist eager to blend India's civilisational acquisitions and repositories with the exigencies of the present and at the same time eager to disseminate these to a world eagerly looking towards India for light and knowledge.

Syama Prasad consistently argued for the need to encourage research "on subjects which have a special relation to the Indian problems of today or the basic conception of Indian culture and civilisation. Indian History, Indian Thought and Philosophy, Indian Art, Architecture, Music and Indian Sociology afford field for laborious work by hundreds of scholars. The fruits of their study and investigation are bound to produce new light which will help us in remodeling the structure of our society and the pattern of our lives in a worthy manner. Information on these subjects is widely sought for today by people coming from distant lands... To unearth the hidden wisdom of our country is not to seek benefit for

ourselves alone, enabling us to appreciate our heritage, but also to share it with the rest of the world.”

His presence, his commitment to the causes he championed inspired confidence not only among Syama Prasad’s adherents and among those who once politically opposed him but also among some of the leading minds of his era. It is little known or discussed that it was Sardar Patel who pushed for Syama Prasad’s entry in the first cabinet of independent India. When as a disciplined political soldier and worker, Syama Prasad is said to have asked Savarkar on the course he should adopt over Patel’s proposal, Savarkar, displaying his essential statesmanship and vision, advised Syama Prasad to accept the offer as it would give an opportunity to directly work for India’s regeneration. Such aspects or actions of these leaders have been conveniently consigned to the dungeons of oblivion lest they upset the carefully crafted and politically potent false image that has served a certain political line.

It is little known, for example, that when the son of the iconic revolutionary-nationalist Bagha Jatin (Jatindranath Mukherjee) asked Sri Aurobindo as to what their course of political action must be in Muslim League dominated Bengal, the Sage of Pondicherry is said to have instructed them to join Syama Prasad and to strengthen his work for the Hindus of Bengal. Even in his acceptance to join the Fazlul Haq government in Bengal as Finance Minister Syama Prasad displayed an astute political sense by ensuring, at least for a while, the sidelining of the Muslim League and exposing the colonial Bengal administration, especially its Governor’s designs to up the ante on the communal front and keep the state on a perennial state of uncertainty and conflict.

In a letter to the then Bengal Governor, Syama Prasad wrote, that:

“for the first time in the history of British India, whatever democratic

constitution has been handed over to us, in spite of its manifold defects, was sought to be worked in Bengal by Hindu and Muslims representatives who wielded considerable influence over their own community. The success of this experiment naturally would give a lie direct to the plea of communal disharmony standing in the way of India's political advancement."

While the Governor and his secretariat, "particularly the British and pro-Muslim League personnel," did "everything possible to discredit the ministry, by putting hindrances in the way of its smooth sailing and encouraging the Muslim League opposition to kick up communal trouble", Syama Prasad performed as one of the best Finance Ministers. It was also a period when after a long interval, the Hindus of Bengal began feeling completely safe and assured. The rabid Islamist elements, the Leaguers and colonial cronies were for the first time sidelined in Bengal politics.

In his personal life and political conviction Syama Prasad Mookerjee's pragmatism, fearless commitment to the democratic spirit and polity of India and especially to her integrity is what defined and set him apart and above many of his peers. While Nehru spoke of crushing dissent and opposition, Syama Prasad spoke of annihilating and crushing that mentality itself. It was largely due to his dexterous statesmanship and vision that an opposition block could evolve and survive the Congress's steam-rolling tendencies. In his short years in Parliament, he not only strengthened the fledgling republic's democratic ethos but also displayed a remarkable appreciation of the federal spirit. Perhaps he was cautioning against a growing Nehruvian tendency when he once observed, that the function of a leader is "to try and bring out the best among his people and not to hesitate to correct their weaknesses – for every nation and every community has its weaknesses: [and] if instead leaders of the people try to follow the easier course – to appeal to weaknesses or to encourage tendencies that they know to be adverse to sound development – then the

result will be not be progress but decline and disaster.”

In the end, as he once observed with great prescience, “Nations live or die according to the character of the people. Wealth, arms, munitions, disciplined armies and navies and air forces are of splendid service but the character of the people, the character in to which the youth is growing, determines the life or death of the nation.”

It augurs well that in the changed political atmosphere of the last one year, Syama Prasad Mookerjee’s vision of civilisational India, and the evolution of her present and future have greater scope for fulfillment and fruition. That would eventually mean the complete dissolution of the Nehruvian narrative and its debilitating expressions and effects.

<http://www.anirbanganguly.in/2015/07/06/why-syama-prasad-mookerjee-is-relevant-today/>

Jana Sangh founder's dream of 'one India' is finally a reality

Asked if he would respect the Indian tricolour, Sheikh Abdul said, “Oh, of course, we will recognise it.” But Syama Prasad Mookerjee was not convinced. In Parliament, he responded, “The Union flag is there in spite of anybody, and that is the flag of free India.” When Abdullah then said “We will treat both flags (that of Kashmir and India) equally,” Mookerjee retorted, “You cannot do it. It is not a question of 50-50. It is not a question of parity. It is the question of one flag for the whole of India, India that includes Kashmir.”

This was the spirit that permeated Mookerjee's struggle for abrogation of Article 370. Mookerjee firmly believed in the abrogation of Article 370. Mookerjee firmly believed in the need to find a solution to this challenge, he clearly understood that if left unaddressed, the issue would allow external forces and elements to interfere with India's unity and progress. His efforts were stonewalled by the Nehru-Abdullah nexus, eventually leading to his treacherous incarceration and death in Srinagar.

The unifying slogan of Ek desh me do vidhan, do nishan, do pradhan, nahi chalenge, nahi chalenge that Mookerjee chanted till his final days has finally been realised. This was one of the core demands of the Jana Sangh and BJP, with legions of its workers struggling and striving for it.

On future India's political will and capacity to remove the temporary provision, Sardar Patel had observed in his final days that it would depend on the “strength and guts of the Indian government” of the future. “If we cannot have confidence in our own strength, not deserve to exist as a nation,” Patel had noted.

That guts and that confidence has again been demonstrated today with the placing of the Constitution (Application to J&K) Order, 2019,

notification in Parliament. Both Narendra Modi and Amit Shah are clear that India shall not succumb to blackmail and that her unity and integrity are not up for barter or negotiation.

It is a culmination of a long, relentless, often lonely struggle waged over nearly seven decades. For Jana Sangh and later BJP, removal of the 'special status' given to Kashmir was a founding and driving article of faith. Jana Sangh's first manifesto stated that "to end the state of uncertainty about Kashmir's future, it should be integrated with Bharat like other states and not given any special position". Over the years, Sangh carried out an unceasing struggle for the removal of Article 370.

Pt Deendayal Upadhyaya and his colleagues launched many movements demanding the divisive provision be scrapped. Upadhyaya himself wrote on the need for complete integration of J&K with the rest of India. The eighth chief of Jana Sangh, Dr Raghuvira, wrote of Kashmir as our puny a-bhumi and spoke of the need to "spread the knowledge" that "the body and soul of Kashmir belong to the whole of India".

BJP's historic Ekta Yatra in 1991, from Kanyakumari to Kashmir, with the message of India is one, had the objective of unfurling the tricolour at the Lal Chowk in Srinagar. With Modi as main strategist and organiser, the Yatra reinforced the consciousness of unity. When it became the subject of "hue and cry" in LS on December 11, 1991, AB Vajpayee had asked whether it was "wrong to say that the entire country from Kashmir to Kanyakumari is one? Is it wrong to repeat the resolution that India cannot be allowed to be divided further at any cost? Is it objectionable to say that Kashmir is an integral part of India?"

<http://www.anirbanganguly.in/2019/08/06/jana-sangh-founders-dream-of-one-india-is-finally-a-reali-read-more-at-http-timesofindia-indiatimes-com-articleshow-70545323-cmsfbclidiwar1a-mtrg-dcpzqlky7fpd9fesfnfhp-cbqq1ymss/>

An indomitable spirit

Syama Prasad Mookerjee continues to permeate and percolate into the very essence and fibre of our national existence

Going beyond mere ritualism of remembering him on his death and birth anniversary the interest in the life and legacy of Syama Prasad Mookerjee is growing by the day and spreading across the country. In the two months that I spent travelling across West Bengal during the campaign for the 2019 general elections, I witnessed the interest and emotion that Syama Prasad Mookerjee's name evoked in the Bengali psyche. Interestingly, this connect with Syama Prasad was not confined to a certain age group, it cut across generations, evoking tears, defiance, confidence and hope across generations.

I met octogenarians and nonagenarians who had met or heard Syama Prasad. His voice, they told me, continues to echo in their minds, his words they could still recall and the description and contour that they articulated brought to the surface the image of a compassionate leader, firm on his political positions, convinced and decisive about what he wished to do for his people, undeterred by extreme adversities and uncertainties, determined to protect India, and to protect his people. As one of his colleagues in the university and beyond, HC Mookerjee, observed in a moving memorial speech after Syama Prasad's passing, "there was nothing reactionary about him", indeed, it was this aspect of his that enabled him to create a broad coalition of opinion that ultimately saved Bengal. The reminiscences of Syama Prasad's personality reminded me of the words of the other mighty shaper of the Bengali imagination, the poet Kazi Nazrul Islam who having been saved by Syama Prasad from an excruciatingly painful and helpless situation had written to him, "Your magnanimity,

generosity and genuine affection for me, your courage, uprightness, and bravery have percolated into every pore of my body and mind.”

Among the youth – I met many of them across the state, many who, braving uncertainty and an atmosphere of fear, had gathered to participate in the many outreach initiatives that we have organised and conducted – I saw an intense commitment and interest in the legacy and contribution of Syama Prasad Mookerjee. It was an informed interest, the urge to spread his words, his vision, and to generate a discourse on his contributions to India and on why he had made a herculean effort to carve out a portion of Bengal by pushing for the creation of West Bengal.

Among youth, the debate was primarily on Syama Prasad’s vision for West Bengal, the interest was to connect that vision to the present of the state. Over the last few years, groups throughout India have begun to observe “West Bengal Day” on June 20, the day in history in 1947, when Bengali Hindu legislators of the Bengal Legislative Assembly voted overwhelmingly in favour of the creation of West Bengal, a homeland they had hoped that the Bengali Hindus, after partition, would live in security and peace pursuing their paths to prosperity. It was a day forgotten in history, until a few years ago when groups began tracing its significance and started observing the day as an occasion for reflecting on the reason and *raison d’être* of West Bengal and on the future of the state and the challenges and struggle that face it.

The vote for the creation of a separate state of West Bengal came about after Syama Prasad had made a gigantic effort both political and intellectual to mobilise the opinion of the Bengali intelligentsia to prevent the entire Bengal from being included in Jinnah’s ‘paradise.’ The Bengal Partition League which had been formed through his efforts saw the involvement of many leading Bengali minds and public figures who began to publicly oppose the move of gifting Jinnah the whole of Bengal. Among them

was the veteran revolutionary and front-ranking intellectual of that age Upendranath Banerjee, Sri Aurobindo's co-accused in the Alipore Bomb Trial and among the first batch of political prisoners to be transported for life to the Cellular Jail (Kala Pani) in Andamans. Upendranath's last years were spent, apart from editing Dainik Basumati – a leading daily, fighting alongside Syama Prasad in trying to ensure that India did not lose the whole of Bengal to the divisive politics of the Muslim League.

Syama Prasad is being increasingly referred to as the creator of West Bengal, which he was, and in the state, he is coming back to the centre stage of the political discourse. Much as the communist, sections of Congress and its political offshoots have tried and continue to try to suppress or malign his legacy, Syama Prasad continues to give rise to waves of action. He stands as the conscience of Hindu Bengalis and of nationalists across the country. Some elements who have, through their negative politics and false intellectual prowess, tried to suppress his legacy have in fact failed. In his death, Syama Prasad became immortal, for as long as India's integrity and unity are challenged from within or from elements outside, his legacy will continue to inspire. Syama Prasad's multi-dimensional contribution to our national life is being increasingly referred to. Despite attempts in the past to marginalise his contribution, the awareness of it is growing.

Penning a tribute on his birth anniversary, his political disciple and heir, Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya, the one who carried the fledgeling Jana Sangh forward, wrote of Dr Mookerjee thus, "His sacrifice was for safeguarding the two principles whose strands are interwoven into his life and work. These two principles are nationalism and democracy." The Kashmir movement, wrote Upadhyaya "was not only for the protection of the basis of our nationalism i.e., India's unity but also for safeguarding the very soul of democracy, i.e. the fundamental rights of the citizens."

Syama Prasad's legacy has a phenomenal capacity for re-inventing

itself across the country and especially in the state which he helped create – West Bengal. This is becoming more evident than ever before. While his death anniversary (June 23) is an occasion to reflect on the nature of democracy, on India's unity and integrity and on the challenges that these face from quarters pledged to subvert and to break apart this unity, it also an occasion to reflect on how Syama Prasad's indomitable spirit continues to permeate and percolate into the very essence and fibre of our national existence and march.

Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam had written to Syama Prasad, "I believe that one day we will make India fully independent. On that glorious day, Bengalis will remember most you and Subhas Bose – you will be the country's true leaders." His words were deeply prescient.

<http://www.anirbanganguly.in/2019/06/21/an-indomitable-spirit/>

To die in harness

In a short life of fifty-two years, Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee achieved much. The last most historic initiative of his life, the founding of Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), the precursor to today's BJP, an initiative that would, in the course of decades, alter the course of Indian politics, was an effort with which he was preoccupied and which indicated his farsightedness. The seed that he had sown against much opprobrium and resistance, the political movement which he began with 10 people, has today after decades of relentless struggle grown, in the form of BJP, into a mighty flow with 11 crore people – members – being a part of it.

Syama Prasad Mookerjee was perhaps among the youngest political leaders of his time – at the age of 46, he joined free India's first Cabinet as Minister for industry and supply – and also as one of the most prescient, who always kept India's national interest, her unity and integrity at the forefront of his politics. His epochal and herculean effort in ensuring that a portion of Bengal, including Kolkata, was retained in India in the form of West Bengal is a saga that ought never to be forgotten. Through his effort, in which he received extensive support from the intelligentsia of Bengal, of leaders from across the political spectrum in the state, Syama Prasad ensured that the Bengali Hindus could live in security and dignity in a portion of India that they could call their own. The stalwarts of that era – thinkers, historians, intellectuals and public personalities such as Jadunath Sarkar, RC Majumdar, Upendranath Banerjee, Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, Radhakumud Mookerji had all come forward to extend their unequivocal support to Syama Prasad's effort at saving a portion of Bengal for India.

It reflected the wide acceptance that he commanded; it also showed his capacity for far thinking and demonstrated the pragmatism of his politics. While leaders like Sarat Chandra Bose, who, under the influence

of HS Suhrawardy, then Chief Minister of Bengal, and the kingpin who implemented Jinnah's call for direct action in Kolkata in August 1946, fell for the pipe dream of a 'united sovereign Bengal', Syama Prasad was clear that the proposal was a mischievous ploy to trap the Bengali Hindus and to eventually hand over the whole of Bengal to Pakistan so that the 'moth-eaten' portions could be filled in. Through a sustained political and intellectual movement, Syama Prasad turned the tide and, in a sense, divided Pakistan. He had once famously retorted to Nehru, 'that you had divided India, while I had divided Pakistan'. The people of West Bengal today and Bengalis in general across India ought to continuously reflect on what the future would have been for them had Syama Prasad Mookerjee, forcefully and courageously not pushed forward and succeeded in creating West Bengal. It is a sad commentary of the politics in the state that Syama Prasad's contribution and struggle had always faced an overbearing wall of silence. Except a few, mainly those who are his ideological descendants and followers, no other leader, in the last six decades or so has shown the magnanimity and grace to acknowledge his singular contribution in the formation of the state.

Dr Mookerjee's other great intervention, and one from which he never emerged alive, was the integration of Jammu & Kashmir with India. He had clearly foreseen that the state, if allowed to drift, would become the centre of a nefarious doctrine of separatism and emerge as the playground of various forces that are inimical to India's national interest and integrity. Syama Prasad also foresaw that loose integration of one major region of the country would also give rise, in the future, to demands for separation, with Pakistan and various other forces fanning the fires of division and extremism. He had a firm conviction in the destiny of India and, therefore, decided to take up personally the struggle for India's integration. That struggle and ultimate sacrifice of his – death in detention in free India – brought to the fore the challenge of separatism, extremism and eventually

terrorism and made known to the people of India the threat that these posed and would continue to pose in the future. It was because of his sacrifice, it was because of his dauntless courage, it was because of his unequivocal stand and non-negotiable attitude when it came to protecting India's sovereignty that the precious, strategic and civilisational portion of Jammu & Kashmir continues to be with India. It was by offering himself to the sacrificial fire that Syama Prasad Mookerjee ensured that India's unity was forever cemented and bridged. It was a warring end that he perhaps himself would have wanted, as he had once poignantly written, 'My fervent desire is to die in harness, struggling and striving for the truth when the end finally comes.' Sri Guruji Golwalkar saw him 'as a true fighter for his motherland' who died 'in the forefront of the battle for integration of Kashmir.' Veer Savarkar saw in him one of Bharat's 'foremost patriots, politician and a born parliamentarian' and called for carrying on the struggle for the 'total integration of the whole of Kashmir with the Hindustan Republic.' But perhaps eminent educationist, public personality, thinker and sometime member of the Constituent Assembly and erstwhile Swaraj Party leader MR Jayakar's tribute was most moving and unsettling, 'To lie in a prison house', wrote Jayakar in his homage, 'locked there by his country's Swadeshi Government, by persons with whom he shared power as a colleague, is a fitting termination of a warring life... Let us hope that this incident will make the Government of India realise... the deep enormity of their behaviours, which ignored all the canons of fairness and justice accepted by civilised governments.' Syama Prasad's struggle for the truth of India's unassailable unity continued, while it consumed him physically, immortalised him in the imagination of all those who continue to strive to protect and nurture the India of the ages... 65 years after that end on June 23, 1953, Syama Prasad's life continues to inspire us to selfless action.

<http://www.anirbanganguly.in/2018/06/23/to-die-in-harness/>

Great love for Bharat Mata

In his tribute to Syama Prasad Mookerjee, one of the tallest leaders of modern India, Acharya JB Kripalani, expressed and articulated the emotions of millions of his countrymen when he movingly wrote, 'I wish to record the great and passionate love that he had for Bharat Mata and her unity. Only political diehards can deny this. It was this passionate love for his country that made him resign his seat in the Bengal Cabinet in 1942 as a protest against the cruel repression of a foreign government. It was this love that again made him resign his seat in the Central Cabinet under the first Congress government in free India, on the issue of the treatment of Hindus in Pakistan and their exodus to India.

It was, I believe, the love for the unity of India that made him participate in the Jammu agitation which unfortunately cost him his life and deprived the nation of his services.' Read This – Say no to plastics! It was this 'great and passionate love' for Bharat Mata that essentially defined Shyama Prasad's public life and unfailingly propelled his actions. It is only the 'political diehards', for whom the term and vision of 'India's national interest' are non-existent, who have consistently worked to suppress, misrepresent or create a cleverly crafted miasma of falsehood around Shyama Prasad's legacy and life.

Read This – Reinvent India's trade pattern From beyond the passage of time, of decades and of our collective memory, Syama Prasad still stands out as a sentinel against that mindset which seeks to dissolve and dilute the essential and civilizational vision of our existence as a nation and a people. Each time, therefore, his legacy is reiterated, every time he is invoked, whenever attempts have been made to seriously examine the many facets of his life, these 'political diehards' have always rallied around pounding their maces of falsehood. Prominent among these today are the worshippers and propitiators of a crass culture of vote-bank politics. For Syama Prasad, as he himself once described it, 'separatism and constriction' are both banes of our

national life and have, therefore, to be resisted, opposed and arrested. It was this driving philosophy that saw him take positions which now in hindsight only prove his prescience and foresight – qualities that only perhaps Sardar Patel and a few other leaders of that era demonstrated in great measure. To those who came in touch with him and worked with him either in their political, official or educational capacities, Syama Prasad was the leader – exuding a deep insight and attention for details, an indefatigable energy for sustained work and application, a deep understanding of human issues and political problems, Syama Prasad endeared himself to people cutting across divides and ideologies.

As one of his associates observed, ‘unlike most ambitious men, he had a very warm heart for his friends – in fact, for anyone in distress.’ It was these qualities combined with a deep connect with his people that led him to undertake the huge famine relief initiative during the genocidal Bengal famine of 1943. When comrades and collaborators were busy spinning tales, subverting and trying to douse the final conflagration of our fight to freedom, Syama Prasad resigned his seat in the Bengal cabinet and plunged wholeheartedly in this final struggle. ‘His patriotic mind,’ noted Asutosh Lahiry a towering nationalist leader, ‘revolted against the manner the ‘Quit India’ movement was being suppressed...unspeakable atrocities were being committed’ and Syama Prasad felt ‘he could no longer associate himself with an Administration which perpetrated such crimes.’ His resignation letter ‘was a historic document, and constituted a scathing indictment of the British administration of the time.’

As the legendary art historian and philosopher OC Ganguly (1881-1974) who had worked closely with Syama Prasad at the University of Calcutta wrote, ‘his sincere patriotism and championship of the people’s causes are illustrated in his work as Minister in the Bengal Cabinet and as Minister of Commerce in the Central Cabinet. He never cared for well-paid offices and

posts for realising personal ambition and profit, but several times resigned from the posts of Minister as soon as he found that he could not support the prevailing Cabinet policy, because it happened to go against the interest of the common people.' A young Deputy Secretary in his Ministry at the Centre, for example, observed how 'his cheering smile and unfailing courtesy had endeared him to all his officers and men who ungrudgingly worked long hours daily feeling that to be associated with such a man was indeed a matter of great fortune and honour. His clarity of thought could hardly be surpassed, and many difficult problems relating to his Ministry would be solved by him with an almost uncanny ease.

While his officers and men worked hard for him, he worked even harder so that work in his Ministry may be disposed of promptly.' Yet it was his continuing connect with his people, his adherence to his commitment which gradually turned Syama Prasad, especially in the last phase of his political life, into a truly pan-Indian leader, one who could challenge the status quo and dare to create a new narrative of national regeneration. In those heady days of Nehruvianism, such an act was often seen as fallacious and chimerical by the cautious and calculating. Perhaps OC Ganguly sums it up best, the life of one he so closely observed, 'As an eminent educationist, as an ardent champion of Hindu Culture, as a distinguished litterateur, as a passionate and sincere patriot, as a friend and champion of the oppressed and down-trodden, as an able Parliamentarian, as an eloquent orator, as a devoted servant of the people, and, above all, as a Humanist, the name of Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee will go down in the pages of history as one of the most distinguished figures that adorned and illuminated the variegated firmament of contemporary India.' Syama Prasad continues to appeal and inspire those whose life and work revolve around the vision of a sovereign, self-reliant, self-possessed image of India.

<http://www.anirbanganguly.in/2017/07/06/great-love-for-bharat-mata/>

Fervent, unfazed, undeterred

Before his lonely and confined death on June 23, 1957 at the age of 52, in then faraway Srinagar – then Governor of West Bengal H.C. Mookerjee describing Syama Prasad's death had said, 'what has added to the poignancy of our grief is that he died in detention, while still seeking to serve the country according to his own lights, far away from his home and from his near and dear ones' – Syama Prasad Mookerjee could have scarcely perhaps believed that one day the political entity – Bharatiya Jana Sangh – that he had formed against great odds and challenges would, in its transmuted avatar, become the ruling party of India with governments not only at the centre but in a number of states. Read This – Say no to plastics! He could not have anticipated for sure that his vision and deeper political objective of giving India a political alternative would eventually propel her in a new era. Or perhaps he could; his deep prescience and political instinct may have assessed the long term harvest in the form of an alternate political narrative that would eventually become the mainstream after years of ceaseless political struggle.

Read This – Reinvent India's trade pattern In fact, it is interesting to note that in his speeches and discourses on education, Syama Prasad often referred to the need to create 'A New India' based on her ancient and perennial civilisational values, the mainspring of her regeneration would have to be her cultural, civilisational and spiritual base, a base which has shaped, nurtured and sustained her fundamentals throughout the ages.

As BJP president Amit Shah, often describes it, while Nehru and his worldview worked to create a new India divorced from her civilisational roots, Syama Prasad advocated the need to recreate 'A New India' based on her civilisational wisdom, ethos and philosophy, which he always argued, are self-renewing and forever evolving. His imprint on Indian politics, on Indian education, on the social issues of the day and on India's struggle for emancipation was unmistakable, recognised and accepted.

A forceful and indefatigable exponent of nationalist causes, a fundamental thinker and implementer- both educational and political, a bridge builder, a leading light for the beleaguered Hindus in Muslim League Bengal, a deft, efficient and remarkably performing Union minister in free India's first cabinet, a nurturer of institutions – his support to and concern for Gurudev Tagore's Visva-Bharati for example is an episode which has been forgotten and marginalised – a relief mobiliser during the excruciating famine of Bengal – in fact it was largely due to Syama Prasad's efforts that the magnitude of the famine that had struck Bengal became known to the whole of India and to the wider world – a voice for the battered Hindus of East Pakistan, the creator of West Bengal as a space where the Bengali Hindu could live with dignity, freedom, security and democratic rights, a voice for opposition space and views in free India's first parliament, when the Congress juggernaut under Nehru brooked no response, a crusader for India's unity and integrity, Syama Prasad adorned many roles and causes, forever fervent, unfazed, undeterred in these many missions that he had undertaken during a short but dynamic political life, as a young statesman, who achieved eminence early in his career, almost a 'political prodigy', as one of his colleagues in the University of Calcutta described him in his tribute. Yet, except perhaps for the party he had founded and those who had worked directly with him, his legacy was never articulated in its entirety and in all fairness, it was deliberately confined and a concerted attempt made to marginalise, minimise and dilute the import of the many contributions he had made to our national life. Had it not been for Syama Prasad, had it not been for his dexterous and forceful advocacy for the need of a state for the Bengali Hindus, West Bengal would have never seen the light of day, subsumed into the dark recesses of Jinnah's greater Pakistan, with its inhabitants consigned to a second class existence, facing discrimination and eventual annihilation. Not only did Syama Prasad convince the Congress and other leaders to support his demand, he succeeded in taking along and bringing on board a large number of leading minds of

the era who rallied around in support of his call to save, at least, a portion of Bengal for being swallowed by Jinnah's dark dream. Ironically his legacy has suffered most in West Bengal under various dispensations. So uncomfortable are some with Syama Prasad, that a leading Bengali daily, claiming to be the most widely read, a few months back used a photograph – that of Syama Prasad addressing a meeting outside parliament on the Kashmir issue – in a weak and confusedly written article, with the caption that the photo was of Syama Prasad holding a 'rabidly Hindutva meeting.' During the Left front regime, a deliberate miasma was created around Syama Prasad's legacy, with the then dispensation refusing to celebrate his birth centenary. Among the Left leaders in that era, there were many who had barely managed to save themselves and had come over to West Bengal as refugees. Syama Prasad had come to their rescue and did for them what Marx and his gaseous philosophy could not. That neglect of Syama Prasad in West Bengal continues, he remains uncomfortable for a certain brand of politics which bases itself solely on the vote-bank arithmetic. But as the winds of nationalism blow, Syama Prasad rises again from the ashes of neglect...

<http://www.anirbanganguly.in/2017/06/22/fervent-unfazed-undeterred/>

Renewing ancient links

A recent visit to Myanmar, I called on Daw Than Than Nu, daughter of the first Prime Minister of Myanmar, the legendary U Nu. I had carried along with me a collage of photographs of U Nu with Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee, from the time when Dr. Mookerjee, as President of the Mahabodhi Society of India, played a decisive role in cementing ties between the two countries and in ensuring that India gave as 'permanent loan' a portion of the relics of Buddha's chief disciples, Mahamogallana and Sariputta to the people of Myanmar. Read This – Say no to plastics! In his letter expressing his gratitude, U Nu wrote, 'that this noble and generous gift of some portions of the sacred relics of the arahants Sariputta and Mogallana for permanent enshrinement in Burma, [would] further cement the already close and unique relationship between our two sister countries... The whole of the Buddhist world, I am sure, would join me in saying sadhu! sadhu! sadhu! for the noble gesture and meritorious deed of your good-self and the Mahabodhi Society of India.' Dr. Mookerjee was a specially invited guest in March 1951, when the sacred relics of the two arahants were finally enshrined in the Kaba Aye Pagoda, in Rangoon (Yangon). Read This – Reinvent India's trade pattern Daw Than Than Nu, herself a well-known political leader who spent many years in India in exile, was deeply moved to know of this link of her father's with Dr. Mookerjee and of how both had worked for such a profoundly symbolic episode. The sacred relics still lie at the Kaba Aye Pagoda, on the central and bustling Kaba Aye Pagoda Road. As we walked around the precincts, in the twilight and then entered relics vault-chamber, the echoes of that 'sadhu, sadhu, sadhu,' faintly rose from within, it is a forgotten but crucial chapter in our history that had a great symbolic as well as strategic value and was initiated by one of our very own leaders and statesman. In a recent study, 'Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee in the Eyes of his Contemporaries' edited by veteran historian Nikhiles Guha and published by the Kolkata-based Asutosh Mookerjee Memorial Institute, one finds more of how Dr. Mookerjee had very astutely reached out to the Buddhist world and begun a movement for renewing and re-stating our civilisational ties. In 1952, Dr. Mookerjee visited the region then known as Indo-China (Indo-Chine) as the head of a cultural delegation at the

invitation of the king of Cambodia, Norodom Sihanouk (1922-2012). Sometime in August 1952, Dr Mookerjee wrote to the Foreign Minister of Cambodia saying that he was looking forward to visiting that ancient country and to 'renewing the old bonds between my country and yours. Lord Buddha is a mighty connecting link between India and many other countries in the world today.' It was finally in October 1952, that Dr Mookerjee visited Cambodia with another portion of the sacred relics of the arahants. J.M.Majumdar, a member of the delegation recalls that 'the reception at Phompenh airport was very impressive...The visit of the Holy Buddhist Relics to Cambodia created a sensation. People travelled hundreds of miles to be present at the airport to personally welcome the relics and take part in the ceremonies. The King of Cambodia and all the high dignitaries were also present at the airport. Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee was welcomed by the King and placed in the Royal Car. The Relics were installed on a decorated car and a long procession headed by the Royal Car proceeded through crowded streets towards the city. The procession travelled nearly seven miles and reached the Silver Pagoda late in the evening.' Welcoming Dr. Mookerjee, King Sihanouk, expressed a deeply held collective feeling when he said, '...It is an immense "Kusala" for our country and people to have henceforth a direct bond with Lord Buddha owing to the arrival of the sacred relics on our soil. This is a unique event in the history of Cambodia which stimulates a unanimous and fervent enthusiasm. I see in this a supreme benediction that Buddha, in his great gentleness and infinite kindness, bestows upon our people for the Buddhist virtues that they practice with purity and conviction.' In his address, Dr. Mookerjee spoke of how 'Centuries ago India sent her ambassadors of peace and goodwill to many countries in the world, especially in Asia, and they carried with them the torch of learning and wisdom, of truth, justice and equality and paved the way for world-fellowship. This ancient land of Cambodia and many other adjoining countries have passed through varying fortunes, good and bad, but they still bear indestructible signs of heritage that have come from our Motherland, Bharat, since time immemorial...' As Prime Minister Modi embarks on his Sri Lanka visit for the 'Vesak' celebrations, one is reminded of these past episodes. In this day and age, it is he who has done much, in the course of the last three years, to renew our civilisational and spiritual bond with the Buddhist world, led by his faith in Buddha's message. As he once said, 'I see Lord

Buddha in the 21st century across national borders, across faith systems, across political ideologies, playing the role of a bridge to promote understanding to counsel patience and to enlighten us.’ Echoing Dr. Mookerjee’s words, clearly, the link renewal has received a new momentum and energy under Prime Minister Modi.

<http://www.anirbanganguly.in/2017/05/11/renewing-ancient-links/>

ARTICULATING THE PAST HISTORY

A third category of people who have spread a Goebblesian propaganda against Mookerjee’s legacy are the communist apologists. For them, his legacy is troublesome. They have, therefore, tried to marginalise any genuine nationalist who has challenged their world

A third category of people who have in the last fortnight barked at Syama Prasad Mookerjee’s legacy and spread a Goebblesian propaganda against him are the communist apologists for the Muslim League, admirers of Jinnah, supporters of separatism and those ‘anti-nationals’ who are now passing themselves off as ‘secular nationalists’ but are in essence pseudo-nationalists whose only obsession is to see India fragment. Describing the then Communist Party’s role, Mookerjee had once noted in his diary, “The Communist Party which all along had played a shameless role in attacking the foundation of Indian nationalism”, one wonders whether the situation has altered today.

In fact, as early as 1944, Veer Savarkar had referred to ‘pseudo-nationalism’ and had pointed out how some, by giving lip service to nationalism and passing themselves off as nationalists, are in fact, assiduously working to wreck apart the national fabric. The ‘pseudo-

nationalists' abound today and are vocal through their pseudo-espousals. One hears them shout loudest for tolerance, for equal treatment, for the right of every part to secede from India, for the right of self-determination of nationalities within the Indian 'subcontinent', for the right to reject the Constitution and to fan the flames of separatism, for the right of terrorists to survive and carry on their trade and all these in the name of democracy, freedom of expression and human rights.

These pseudo-nationalist have new tune today which argues that they alone are the inheritors of the 'anti-colonialist nationalist' legacy. A laughable assertion, if one was to take into account their collaborationist past.

For the apologists of separatism and 'Bharat ke barbadi', Mookerjee's legacy is troublesome, it reminds them of the strength and resilience of genuine nationalism and nationalists, it reminds them of the determination that such nationalism gives rise to in one who is driven and inspired by it. The genuine nationalists' have faith in the integrity of India, the genuine nationalists' belief in the fundamental oneness within India's many diversities is an unsettling belief for the pseudo-nationalists who have always believed in the theory of many nationalities within India and espoused the eventual separation of these leading to India becoming a congeries of nations. These elements have, therefore, ceaselessly tried to minimise and marginalise any personality or genuine nationalist who has challenged their world either in the past or in the present.

Their favourite, false and now much clichéd accusation against Mookerjee is that he collaborated with the British. Again a study of the plethora of papers, booklets, statement and correspondences that exist at the Nehru Memorial Museum & Library in Delhi repeatedly puncture a hole and deflate such propaganda.

In fact it is again amusing to hear this from those very scholars whose ideological progenitors themselves collaborated with the British to sabotage the saboteurs of British rule during the Quit India movement. Stacks, if not mounds of files, still exist that tell the entire story of how the communists ‘sabotaged’ the ‘anti-saboteurs’ of the Quit India movement and sought accolades and protection from their white masters.

The other churlish accusation against Mookerjee is that he did precious little during the great Bengal famine. Again the documents belie such a claim, Mookerjee’s own diaries, debates in the Assembly of that period, records of famine relief work reveal the herculean effort he had made to mitigate the epochal disaster. There has been little reference to or study of his interventions during this period, though Madhushree Mukherjee in her opus, *Churchill’s Secret War*, has for example, briefly touched upon his role and Chatterjee in his political biography of Mookerjee has addressed his role in great academic detail. But the reason why Mookerjee’s role of providing relief during the great famine is suppressed or misinterpreted is perhaps because it militates against a stereotype — how could a Hindu Mahasabha leader be one of the principal mover for famine relief during a famine which saw the Muslim peasantry being severely affected. Mookerjee’s role during the Bengal famine did not fit into the stereotype that some would like us to believe and absorb.

Not only active relief, defying DI rules that prevented publicising the famine and disseminating the plight of the people of Bengal across the country, Mookerjee wrote a series of articles on the famine situation exposing the callousness and indifference of the League Ministry and the colonial administration. “We have no confidence”, he stated in the Assembly, “in the ability, integrity and honesty of this Ministry. It is not nature’s hand alone that is dealing Bengal a death blow. Political maladministration lies at the root of the present catastrophe.” It was mainly because of Mookerjee

that “the whole country learnt of the horrors of the ghastly tragedy of the Bengal famine” and it was again because of him that the “Government was forced to appoint an enquiry committee to go into the causes of the famine and take other remedial steps.”

Mookerjee’s appeal for the famine relief funds saw an ‘unimaginable’ country-wide response and large number of organisations joined the Relief Coordination Committee that Mookerjee formed. The communists of course kept themselves away from the Relief Coordination Committee, preferring to downplay the disaster and yet provide a semblance of their participation in relief work. While the communists stayed aloof, the Muslim League and its Khaksar organisation continued with their nefarious designs by exploiting the situation and sending affected Hindus, especially women and children, to some of the sham relief centres they had put up outside Bengal “with a view to ultimately convert them to Islam” and exploit their helpless plight. Even here, Mookerjee intervened, directly met the Khaksar leaders, asked them to desist from such trafficking and to hand over Hindus to relief camps run by the Mahasabha, the Bharat Sevashram Sangha and the Ramakrishna Mission.

He upped the pressure on the Government on this front and during the crisis, he succeeded in generating sufficient pressure to stop this trade. These inhuman dimensions of the famine will never be discussed as it exposes and proves hollow the specious arguments put forward by the apologists of the Muslim Leagues.

<http://www.anirbanganguly.in/2016/08/03/articulating-the-past-history/>

BUILDING INDIA'S INDUSTRIAL SPINE

It is an asinine mind that tries to distort records, and through a Google search, attempts to disprove SP Mookerjee's contribution as India's first Industry and Supply Minister. His role in strengthening the handloom and textile industry in India cannot be overlooked

The dynamics of the exhibition (on the multifaceted aspects of the life and legacy of Syama Prasad Mookerjee at the Nehru Memorial Museum & Library in Delhi) is hardly intelligible to a group of so-called reporters and intellectuals who analyse such an exercise through prejudiced lens and have no idea of the very concept and purpose of public exhibitions. The attitude of some of these assessors in fact is hilarious as they pass themselves off as the guardian pack of the Nehruvian legacy yelping and yapping at anyone else being given even a miniscule due in nation-building.

In fact, a certain war historian attached to a publicly funded think-tank — not as adept at post-independent India's political history — without visiting the exhibition even once found howlers in it, while a callow reporter tried to prove with all her might, how Syama Prasad Mookerjee did practically nothing as free India's first Industry and Supply Minister and of how the steel plant at Bhilai could not have been built by him since it was set up in 1958.

The exhibition itself did not claim that Mookerjee set up the plant; it rather argued that he conceived it. Mookerjee's authoritative biographer Prashanto Chatterjee, probably among the few who has sifted through thousands of pages of relevant documents has this to say, "Mookerjee also conceived the plan of establishing a steel plant at Bhilai, 16 miles west of Raipur and nine miles to the east of Durg in CP, at an approximate cost of `88 crore and with capacity of producing 5,50,000 tonnes per annum.

The CP Government was requested by Mookerjee's Secretary to find out the progress made in ascertaining the iron content of the iron ore deposits within the boundaries of the CP..."

Chatterjee clearly states "His dream of establishing a new steel plant to improve the quantity and quality of steel production in India was fulfilled in 1955 when an agreement for the Bhilai steel plant at an estimated cost of ` 110 crore came up..."

It is an asinine mind that tries to distort records and through a Google research attempts to disprove Mookerjee's contribution as Minister. For example, it is a fact that between 1948 and 1950 the "All India Handicrafts Board, the All India Handloom Board and the Khadi and Village Industries Board were set up to supply the much needed organisation and finance required by cottage and small scale industries to survive and develop."

Mookerjee took a keen interest in the working of his Ministry and made full use of the scope to make a difference in these sectors. In 1949 the Central Silk Board was established under the Central Silk Board Act LX of 1948, to improve the "Silk industry under Central control." One sees a clear pattern during this period, that of his constant attention to support, improve and innovate on industries that employed a vast number of ordinary Indians and in which India, some time back, was a recognised leader before being exploited and bled by colonial industrial policies.

To argue that as Minister for Industry Mookerjee played a leading role in pushing for these institutions in no way minimises the legendary Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay's role in reviving handloom in India. A normal and balanced mind would always look for the cooperative link between the two as the most natural approach in those early days. By highlighting the highlights of Mookerjee's achievements as Minister of Industry, the exhibition does not seek to down play contributions of other stalwarts.

Mookerjee himself was a great consensus builder, and one who could reach out to a large cross-section and seek their assistance and support and recognise expertise and ability. His ministerial record, his record of managing his Ministry is full of such instances. It is again only an asinine mind that would seek to place Mookerjee and Kamaladevi in a confrontationist mould. Mookerjee's contribution in strengthening the handloom and textile industry in India cannot be overlooked, it is a story which Google does not narrate but which his papers at Nehru Memorial Museum & Library in Delhi clearly point towards.

While he was occupied with heavy industries, Mookerjee also championed the cause of the small and indigenous industries. His intervention on behalf of the Tamil Nadu match industry, the woollen handloom industry of north India and the cotton handloom industry are cases in point. These would of course require a detailed study which is in any case beyond the capacities of the casual and callow observer or commentator. His attention for the indigenous and small industrial sector in India is a fact, simply because one does not want to soil one's hands in the archives does not mean it can be denied.

The war historian, mentioned earlier, found it amusing that Mookerjee was given credit for the division of Bengal and the exhibition did not blame Jinnah for it. Such a facetious argument obviously shows how little he knows of the story of Bengal partition, of how it saved lakhs of Hindus, allowing them to live a life of dignity saving them from being victims of anti-Hindu pogroms in east Pakistan and of how Jinnah bemoaned the fact that Mookerjee had outsmarted him and handed him over a moth-eaten Pakistan.

The exhibition displayed a Gallup poll, conducted and reported by Amrita Bazar Patrika, where over 98 per cent Bengalis voted for the partition of Bengal. It is common knowledge, though hardly accepted

today especially by the communists and the Trinamool Congress politicians, that Calcutta and West Bengal was saved from Muslim League ravages because of Mookerjee, who stoutly refused to join the chorus of a “United Sovereign Bengal” sung by HS Suhrawardy and Sarat Bose and instead called for a division of Province and for a homeland for the Bengali Hindus who did not want to live and be part of east Pakistan.

In this demand of his Mookerjee was not only supported by leading Bengali intellectuals and public personalities of the day but also by the overwhelming majority of the state as well as the all India Congress leadership. He had, through his demand, blurred party lines. Those opposing him then and now were communists and Muslim Leaguers. War historians would do well to limit themselves to studying wars and not venture into the tricky, slippery and often contentious maze of partition politics. By indulging in rhetoric over it, they may risk losing themselves in a miasma of confusion and confused thinking.

<http://www.anirbanganguly.in/2016/07/27/building-indias-industrial-spine/>

NEW LIGHT ON FORGOTTEN STALWARTS

An exhibition on the multifaceted aspects of the life and legacy of Syama Prasad Mookerjee at the Nehru Memorial Museum & Library in Delhi has raised the hackles among those who have imposed a mono-narrative on us and have been intolerant towards a diversity of views

For the first time, since his untimely death 63 years ago, Syama Prasad Mookerjee was allotted a 400 square feet area, for about a fortnight, in Nehru Memorial Museum & Library (NMML) so that an exhibition on his life and contribution to our national life could be displayed. This effort raised the hackles of sections that have, over the last four decades, always imposed a mono-narrative on us and have generally been intolerant towards diversity of views, and of reading. For some who believe that the Nehru Memorial Museum was the first Prime Minister's personal property or that of his present descendents, such a move was sacrilegious. Such is the actual level of tolerance and acceptance of a section that has, ad nauseam, been reminding others of the need for dialogue and tolerance.

Shaped as they have been by the line and narrative which fete only some leaders and their legacy, this group was also particularly incensed that BJP president Amit Shah should have been invited to inaugurate the exhibition and deliver an address in which he freely and yet, with great insight, discussed the principal personalities — that is Mookerjee and Nehru, the main political issues of that age and especially the crucial contributions and interventions of Mookerjee.

Shah had argued in his talk that a serious study of the period that led to India's independence and the phase immediately after that cannot be studied without making an assessment of Mookerjee. Shah had also

expressed his appreciation of the efforts made by the NMML and its staff to put up this exhibition. The stereotype that is habitually applied to the so-called “Right-wingers” by the power elites of the national capital and by their hangers on in the academia and media did not fit Shah — how could he deliver a well-woven and well-argued speech on political history

they questioned, that preserve was best left to themselves and to the card holder and certified historians of the Marxian mould.

Instead of allowing and appreciating a free and open discourse and debate on these aspects of our history, all that this section did, was to take pot shots at Shah. The likes of Jaipal Reddy and Kamal Morarka, themselves consigned to the pantheon of Congress history, suddenly resurrected themselves or were resurrected and attempted to generate an ill informed debate on Mookerjee’s life and contributions.

Out from the political cold storage after a long spell, they were obviously out of depth and instead of appearing as calibrated assessors of the history of post-independence India, they simply exposed their own ignorance and convoluted thinking.

After all, habituated to supping for so long an ideological potage that is devoid of logic or pint of rationality, these political leaders have given up their faith in the necessity and usefulness of wide thinking, of alternate view points and in the need for recognising the contributions of a large number of leaders who too had India’s interest and well-being at heart. Since their political fortunes have always depended on singing paeans to one political dynasty, the habit of intellectual discovery and quest have long since overtaken them. The last historian worth his salt in the original Congress was Bhogaraju Pattabhi Sitaramayya and even he would lament how ill-appreciated his work on the Congress history was.

Others, less informed who believe that the NMML is meant to only

promote and support research on Nehru's life, overlook or are ignorant of the fact that its mandate is to conduct research on and preserve papers and documents of our freedom fighters, revolutionaries, our Constitution framers and all those leaders who have shaped India's polity pre and post independence. For them, the move to commemorate the contributions of Mookerjee was an act that defiled the original intent of the institution and, therefore, worthy of being belittled or condemned.

They do not know or have little recollection of the fact that the NMML is one of the best and largest repository of private papers, of papers and documents connected to our struggle for freedom, of documents that narrate the revolutionary dimension of our freedom struggle, of political documents, of documents that depict the evolution of politics in modern India, of oral histories and a host of other genres. It is worth recalling the herculean effort Haridev Sharma made in collecting these wide genres of papers from across the country and the world. His indefatigable exploits in collecting these papers and in turning NMML into a rich storehouse of documents that narrate all political views is indeed by itself a saga worth recording.

Papers connected to Mookerjee himself run into 70,000 pages. The NMML has the Vinayak Damodar Savarkar papers, the Hindu Mahasabha papers, Asutosh Lahiri papers, and much more. It was physically and conceptually impossible to use all details present in these thousands of pages for the exhibition — which was of a limited framework with 250 words per exhibit panel consisting of 18 panels in all.

The exhibition was meant to give an idea of Mookerjee's multi-dimensional personality and aimed at encouraging the actual researcher, the political worker, the scholar and academic to undertake a serious study of his life and times and of his thoughts as well.

The fact that the exhibition also liberally used and displayed primary sources, letters and correspondences — letters exchanged between Mookerjee and Mahatma Gandhi, between Mookerjee, Sardar Patel and Nehru, especially the period of his resignation from the Union Cabinet and his own diary, letters he wrote to other personalities — made it stand apart from some other such exercises in the past. The idea was, as one of the senior curators working on it noted, to encourage the observer and readers to delve into the rich collection of primary documents that the library stored and thus give rise to a spirit of inquiry and research.

<http://www.anirbanganguly.in/2016/07/20/new-light-on-forgotten-stalwarts/>

ARTICULATING THE TRUTHS OF HISTORY

On Syama Prasad Mookerjee's 115th birth anniversary, it's time people get over their ignorance, and communicate, without fear, certain historical truths about him that have been subverted by both British colonialists and communist historians

In 1944, Syama Prasad Mookerjee, in collaboration with the legendary Ram Nath Goenka, founded the English daily *The Nationalist*— a daily that would be “fully nationalist” and “thoroughly independent”. Mookerjee wrote to Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, informing him of the effort and sought his contributions in terms of articles and thoughts. In his letter to Mookerjee, dated October 25, 1944, Savarkar talked of the need for a “genuine nationalism that takes its stand on the equality all citizens irrespective of caste or creed...” Such letters are never cited especially in case of nationalist like Savarkar or Mookerjee, because it hammers away at false stereotypes framed and popularised, over the years, by an interested section.

The Nationalist, in its brief life eventually earned the wrath of the colonial administration with Wavell complaining of the “consistently anti-British, anti-Allies nature of its articles.” In fact, Mookerjee's persistently anti-colonial attitude led him to be excluded from the Simla talks in 1945. It was clear, as one of Mookerjee's biographer notes, “that exclusion of Mookerjee and the Hindu Mahasabha from the Simla Conference was really due to two reasons — Mookerjee's view on the structure of the new Constitution which was not acceptable to Jinnah and his “anti-British and anti-allies” attitude.”

This reality has been skillfully obfuscated or subverted by intellectuals who are essentially apologists for communist collaborators of the British. The lamentable reality of our times is that some of these apologists and relics

of communism in India have called Mookerjee a collaborator of the Muslim League without even possessing an elementary modicum of knowledge of the history of that period. Of late, a certain portal — let me not dignify it by naming it — run essentially by a group whose members have earned distinction by pilfering money they had collected in the name of providing relief to victims of the Gujarat riots of 2002, has suddenly taken interest in Mookerjee and hired a mercenary intellectual to conduct a hit-job on his persona. The modus operandi of this group, whether in Gujarat against Modi-Shah or now in attacking Mookerjee's legacy, has always been to use a network of mercenary pseudo-intellectuals who base themselves on half-truths and fantasies and eventually dish out a most atrocious broth of propaganda laced lies.

To call a leader who, alongwith Sarat Chandra Bose, firmed up the first Hindu-Muslim coalition cabinet sans the League in Bengal and managed to successfully sideline Jinnah's politics in that Province for a while, to call one who deftly and resolutely opposed and organised opposition to the Muslim League's highly communal Bengal Secondary Education Bill which aimed to communalise education in the Province as a collaborator of the Muslim League, is either a sign of an increasing mental dementia or the result of a deep depression induced by the realisation of a growing academic and political irrelevance.

In fact Mookerjee decided, in the wider interest of Bengal and of India, to keep the Muslim League out of power in the Province. When the Congress refused to align itself with Fazlul Haq, it lost an opportunity to marginalise the League. Mookerjee unwilling to let the opportunity slip away worked to bring "all the non-Congress Hindu forces together in the legislature to form the Progressive Democratic Coalition" with Haq. By then, Haq's dalliance with the League had ended because he realised how Jinnah had used him, betrayed him and marginalised him by virtually decimating his party.

The 'Syama-Haq' coalition, as it popularly came to be called, was an eye sore both for the British and the Leaguers and from the start John Herbert, then Governor of Bengal, worked to destabilise and scuttle the experiment. This episode of Bengal's history is hardly ever discussed, as I mentioned in my previous column, simply because it does not fit stereotypes of 'Right-wingers' that have been assiduously drawn up by communists and their protégés. As BJP president Amit Shah told those gathered at the Nehru Memorial Museum & Library after dedicating an exhibition on Mookerjee's life, that both the British colonialist and the communist historians have distorted the history of India.

To call a leader who organised the largest non-Governmental relief work during the Bengal Famine of 1943 and who exposed the indifference and collusion of the League Ministry and the colonial administration in it, as a collaborator of the League, to call one who strove against great odds and succeeded in retaining a portion of Bengal in India and ensured that Jinnah's Pakistan was not a greater land of the pure but a moth-eaten and ruptured piece of land as a collaborator of the League, is supremely churlish and displays a spirit of charlatanism of the first order. In fact these false interpretations by Marxists, hired intellectuals, five star activists and propagandists have always been reserved for nationalist icons or leaders, leaders who have firmly based their politics on the faith and reality of India as a nation, as a unity and as a civilisation.

One never sees these pseudo-intellectuals criticise Jinnah or the Muslim League, nor the pogrom on Hindus in east Pakistan, nor do they ever write on how Indian communists promoted and parroted Jinnah's demand for Pakistan arguing that India was a congeries of nations, nor, nearer our times, does one see them condemn the call for bloody revolution hurled by Naxals and Maoists. Criticising or trying to muddy Mookerjee's legacy is like "throwing mud at the Kanchenjunga." Criticism from puny intellectuals

whose commitment to India is always suspect should not bother us, who wish to preserve, disseminate, explain and narrate his legacy and contribution to our national life.

Similarly Mookerjee's successful efforts to generate a country-wide movement in support of Indian National Army soldiers, his stellar leadership in asking the British Government to release Mahatma Gandhi then on fast in prison in Pune is hardly ever mentioned. His letter to the Governor Herbert in July 1942 warning him of the consequences of trying to suppress a legitimate movement of the people led by the Congress and his plea that the civilian Government and Ministers mandated to carry forward the administration be allowed to do so without hindrance — implying that the permanent British bureaucrats and Governor act on the instructions of the Indian ministers and not on their own, has been similarly distorted by some superannuated Marxists scholars who dish out selected portions of it and then interpret these in silos.

During the years of Quit India, while Indian communists broke bread with their British masters, the Hindu Mahasabha under Savarkar and Mookerjee became the umbrella shelter for a large number of Congressmen and revolutionaries to carry on with the struggle. These historical truths have never been adequately presented as they reverse a certain received narrative. It is convenient for some to create a miasma of falsehood and half-truths; it serves the nefarious political goals of a certain section.

The time has come, as Shah reminded his audience; when our people must get over their ignorance and articulate, without fear, the truths of history. Mookerjee's 115th birth anniversary this July 6 is a beginning of that articulation, a fitting tribute to this visionary democrat-nationalist.

<http://www.anirbanganguly.in/2016/07/06/articulating-the-truths-of-history/>

INTERVENTIONS THAT SAVED INDIA

Had it not been for Syama Prasad Mookerjee's interventions, India would have been a different place — its very *raison d'être* severely challenged and besieged. His sacrifice ensured that the civilisational bonds between this portion of India and the rest were further cemented

Delivering a captivating public address in Thiruvananthapuram on the occasion of Syama Prasad Mookerjee's martyrdom day on June 23, BJP national president Amit Shah, while discussing Mookerjee's multifaceted personality, made an interesting observation, he said that Mookerjee made three epochal interventions in the history of modern India that decisively altered the trajectory national events. That Mookerjee could make these three epochal interventions within a short lifespan of about 52 years, argued Shah, was in itself striking and inspiring. Each of these interventions, Shah observed, altered the trajectory of modern India.

The first was his intervention which ruptured Jinnah's plan of greater Pakistan and the retaining of Calcutta and West Bengal in India as a place where the Bengali Hindus could live and also find refuge after being pushed out of east Pakistan, the second was the formation of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) as a nationalist alternative to the faction ridden and increasingly one-tracked Congress, which in the early days after independence, especially after the demise of Sardar Patel, had already begun degenerating into a one-man driven vehicle and the third was Mookerjee's intervention in Kashmir which eventually ensured that the State remained as an integral part of the Indian Union.

It will be interesting to extrapolate on what would have happened had Mookerjee not initiated these interventions? The first of course is self-evident, the entire Bengal and Punjab would have gone to Pakistan providing jihad a

larger area from which to breed and spread the poison. The Bengali Hindus, on the other hand, without a home state, would have to migrate to various parts of the country as a dispossessed and displaced people clinging to the memories of a homeland. The communists and the Trinamool Congress (TMC) would have no space or the luxury to practice their brand of violent and communal politics sans West Bengal.

In Pakistan and east Pakistan and later in Bangladesh, the communist variety of politics has been thrown out and its leaders either liquidated or co-opted within the framework of a vastly different political framework. Proletarianism, dialecticism and class war or secularism had no place in Pakistan, whose formation Indian communists so wholeheartedly supported and facilitated. On the other hand TMC chief Mamata Banerjee, who celebrates the anniversaries of every other Bengali personality and takes to social media to deliver messages, has always been conspicuously silent on Mookerjee's legacy and contributions. The false fear of alienating a certain section of her vote-bank has always seen her ignore his contribution in the formation of West Bengal. His successful experiment with Fazlul Haq in the formation of the progressive coalition ministry — popularly known as the Syama-Haq ministry — and its success in sidelining the Muslim League in Bengal is deliberately ignored and suppressed.

While Indian communists were actively colluding with their colonial sponsors to sabotage the Quit India movement, Mookerjee, then Finance Minister of Bengal, resigned with this words, “The reign of repression that we have witnessed in India since August last [August 1942] has been directed not only against a so-called subversive movement but against every form of nationalist activities, calculated to mobilise the will-powers of Indians to throw off a foreign rule that they intensely dislike.” Mookerjee exerted himself to the outmost to see that the repression unleashed was reversed and when he failed to do that he resigned pointing out that provincial autonomy

under the British was indeed a “farce.” But we digress; let us come back to the question, had Mookerjee not made these interventions...

Mookerjee’s second intervention was when he created BJS. Realising early the unilateralism of the Congress and the dictatorial tendencies of its leadership in the absence of a viable alternative, Mookerjee launched this alternate political narrative. “Political independence becomes meaningful only if it is accompanied by realisation of the National Self”, pointed out the first manifesto of BJS, that Mookerjee drafted, “and only this realisation of the National Self would help open up the mainsprings of people’s energies so that the nation could overcome the feeling of dependence and defeatism, and experience the glow of freedom.” It was this quest for the “National Self” that led him to create this alternative.

It also argued that [India] is beset with a horde of problems, internal and external, old and new, which instead of nearing solution after independence are daily getting aggravated. Its common people are being ground down under the weight of economic distress, social security and political repression. Its production is falling, black-marketing and profiteering are rampant and charges of corruption and favouritism against the administration, which is top heavy, are being openly made. As a result of all this an atmosphere of general demoralisation and frustration has developed in every sphere.

This state-of-affairs, if allowed to grow unchecked, would spell disaster for the country. “The mistaken policies and ‘Abharatiya’ and unrealistic approach to the national problems by the party in power”, it observed, “is primarily responsible for this state-of-affairs in the country. In their anxiety to make Bharat a carbon-copy of the West, they have ignored and neglected the best in Bharatiya life and ideals. They have failed to harness the enthusiasm created by freedom to the task of realisation of the great potentialities of the country.” Had Mookerjee not intervened by creating BJS, Congress unilateralism would have dominated; it would have pushed

India into a one-party or a one family rule and Indian democracy would have been poorer, with less or little options, and with democratic voices facing a stifling embargo put up by a spirit of political intolerance.

Mookerjee's last intervention was in the affairs of Jammu & Kashmir which, he argued, had to be more completely integrated with India in order to ensure India's well-being and its security and integrity. The sovereignty of the Indian Parliament and the Indian Constitution, Mookerjee felt, had to be paramount and the benefit of the Constitution had to reach all citizens. Had Mookerjee not made this final — and for him fatal because he never emerged out it alive — intervention, the entire State of Jammu & Kashmir would have perhaps gone into the control of those forces who wish to see India fragmented and in flames.

His intervention and sacrifice ensured that the civilisational bonds between this portion of India and the rest were further strengthened and cemented. The last was indeed a civilisational intervention that saved for India one of her most sacred and strategic portions. For preserving and perpetuating India's unity and freedom even death was acceptable, as he once presciently observed, "We must live and die for India and her liberty. This an article of faith with us and it admits of no compromise."

Had Mookerjee not made these interventions, India would have been different place — its very *raison d'être* severely challenged and besieged. His death anniversary on June 23 and his birth anniversary on July 6 thus, offer an ideal occasion for reflecting on these. Such a reflection may offer great lessons and insights, especially at a time when calling for India's destruction and disintegration is de rigueur for some...

<http://www.anirbanganguly.in/2016/06/29/interventions-that-saved-india/>

IRREVERSIBLE ACT OF INTOLERANCE

It is ironical that a champion of democracy and an upholder of the dignity of the Constitution such as Syama Prasad Mookerjee, should have been detained, confined and thrown to death a little over a year after the formation of free India's first Parliament

In a short life of 52 years, Syama Prasad Mookerjee strode many worlds and in each left his indelible and inimitable imprint. By the time he died on June 23, 1953 — a lonely and unattended death in detention in Srinagar — Mookerjee had already crossed many landmarks and initiated political interventions that would eventually alter the course of independent India's political history. His determination to reject the 'abharatiya' direction of national growth which aimed to make Bharat "a carbon copy of the West" and which ignored the "best in Bharatiya life and ideals" and failed to "harness the enthusiasm created by freedom to the task of realisation of the great potentialities of the country" saw him launch a movement in the final phase of his life, for creating an alternative political narrative and vision that would, through a series of trials, tribulations and struggle assume the centrestage of our political life.

A conservative in the widest and most democratic sense, Mookerjee displayed, throughout his life, a profound commitment to and sensitivity towards India's civilisational values, its civilisational knowledge-pool and sought to remould, re-state and situate these in India's struggle for emancipation and in its quest for re-building a new life after political freedom was won. His articulations always possessed three dimensions — the local or the regional, the national and the international, and in each he sought to define and situate the Bharatiya dimension or layer. Naturally, for those infatuated with communism, socialism and fascism whose primary

task was always to denigrate and propagate against civilisational India such a stance was inexplicable as well as unacceptable.

Contrary to what some have projected, a profound sense of identity with India's fundamental unity and a deep recognition of its diversities exemplified Mookerjee's outlook and approach, it was this diversity in oneness that had to be preserved, perpetuated and safeguarded, as he noted, in his address to one of the sessions of the Hindu Mahasabha, of which he was the Working President from 1940-1944, "India according to its tradition and history has remained the home of followers of diverse religions, faiths and creeds. All ultimately being assimilated in the mighty stream of Indian culture and civilisation. This unity amidst diversity has been the keynote of Indian civilisation. Indian history gives us many examples, of unique achievements in arts, literature, religion, social and political advancement when unity was the dominant note of Indian life." He was not, as he told his communists colleagues in Parliament, like those "who do not believe that India is nation but is a combination of separate nationalities." Of course for a majority of those who have calumniated the contribution of Mookerjee, diversity and diversities have always been seen as convenient fire-iron for promoting class conflict and unrest. They have always denied the wielded unity of these diversities that civilisational India has always signified.

The first act of intolerance and of fascism that spewed disdain towards our democratic framework was when a personality of his stature — one who, while leading a then fledgling party in Opposition, commanded the acceptance of leaders cutting across party lines, one who as member of "Free India's first Cabinet" drove himself to reverse India's de-industrialisation and displayed a complete faith in the fundamental principles of India's Parliament and its Constitution — was tricked into a confinement from which he emerged dead.

But what is fascinating and can inspire those who wish to truly undertake

a study of Mookerjee's life and contribution towards the consolidation and preservation of Indian nationhood and its democratic spirit are the various dimensions and aspects of his contributions, aspects and contributions which are defined by an undiluted and selfless patriotism and an ineradicable faith in the Constitution of India.

Card carrying communist party historians, who, nibbling and feasting on official doles, have toiled a lifetime to justify or whitewash the subversive role of communists in India's freedom movement have often tried to falsify Mookerjee's legacy and minimise his contributions to our national life or to portray him as a fascist majoritarian who brooked no diversity of opinion and of purpose. The reality as seen in Mookerjee's own life was quite the opposite. A deep study and dissemination of his life and works in order to dispel the myths and the shadows of false propaganda and duplicitous historical research is the need of the hour.

Interestingly, even in his last movement in support of the Praja Parishad's demand for the full integration of the State of Jammu & Kashmir in India, Mookerjee displayed a most catholic parliamentary spirit and approach, continuously emphasising that what was required was the settlement of the issue through dialogue and a mutual understanding. While Nehru displayed obduracy and Sheikh Abdullah an ambivalent opportunism, Mookerjee continued to remain steadfast in his demand for a constitutional approach to the issue.

Facts have often been obfuscated for political expediency, as for example, it has hardly been pointed out that in one of his first letters to Nehru on the topic, Mookerjee wrote, "please do not overlook that a good number of Muslims in Jammu have also joined the movement" (for complete integration). His true constitutional sense and adherence to constitutional values in free India saw him repeatedly call for dialogue, as when he told Parliament and asked the Prime Minister to let them meet Sheikh Abdullah,

“we would have liked to have met Sheikh Abdullah and others in a friendly way and explained our point of view to them. We want to come to an agreement, an agreement which will make it possible for India to retain its unity and Kashmir to retain its separate existence from Pakistan and be merged with India.” His determination for upholding the sovereignty of “Free India’s” Parliament was paramount, he told the Prime Minister on the Floor of the House, “There cannot be two Sovereign Parliaments in India” and why should Abdullah be “afraid of accepting the Sovereignty of this Parliament of Free India.”

His objective in making this demand was without blemish, as when he argued, during one of the last discussions regarding the motion on Kashmir, “We must be able to show that India is not only in theory, but also in fact, a country where Hindus, Muslims, Christians and everyone will be able to live without fear and with equality of rights. That is the Constitution we have framed and which we propose to apply rigorously and scrupulously.” His criticism of policies, Mookerjee argued, was, therefore, never prompted by “some narrow, sectarian, communal motive”, it was rather “the fear that what you are doing may lead to the ‘balkanisation’ of India, may lead to the strengthening of the hands of those who do not want to see a strong United India.”

It was thus supremely ironical, an epochal tragedy of Himalayan proportions, that a champion of Parliament and an upholder of the dignity of the Constitution such as him, should have been detained, confined and thrown to death within a little over a year after the formation of free India’s first Parliament. Indeed a colossal, lamentable and irreversible act of intolerance...

<http://www.anirbanganguly.in/2016/06/22/irreversible-act-of-intolerance/>

OLD, NEW CRISIS BENGAL FACES

While Syama Prasad Mookerjee strove hard to ensure that Bengali Hindus live and thrive in free India, his early death and a lack of leadership in West Bengal altered the political dynamics. In three odd decades, the CPI(M)-led Left Front changed the State's demography

When Syama Prasad Mookerjee decided to “divide Pakistan” he had once famously quipped before Jawaharlal Nehru that while the latter had divided India, he (Syama Prasad) had divided Pakistan one of his principal objectives was to ensure that Bengali Hindus get a space where they can live and perpetuate culturally and civilisationally. In fact, on this issue, as in many others, Mookerjee received support from the indomitable Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. Sardar Patel's position on Bengali Hindu refugees, like that of Syama Prasad's was unequivocal and forthright and in sharp contrast to Nehru's dithering and confusion. In fact, Sardar Patel had argued that if the large number of Hindus from east Pakistan was made to leave their home and hearth due to “unsatisfactory conditions created there, the Pakistan Government must provide additional space for their settlement.”

By 1950, when the trickle of Hindu refugees from east Pakistan converted into a wave because of the intensification of anti-Hindu pogrom, Sardar Patel, according to author Durga Das, “gave out that if Pakistan could not guarantee safe and honourable existence to the Hindus, it must be made to yield a part of east Bengal to India for their rehabilitation”. Sardar Patel's attitude in support of the Bengali Hindus so unnerved and flared Nehru that he offered to resign. A study remains to be done on how Nehru displayed a step-motherly attitude towards the Bengali Hindu refugees, refusing the proposal of a complete exchange of population on

India's eastern flank, stalling any effort at giving adequate succour and compensation and always insisting that the Bengali Hindu refugees go back to their lands in east Bengal and continue living there despite acute persecution and insecurity. In the case of refugees from Punjab, as historian Prafulla K Chakrabarti pointed out in his classic study of the refugee movement in Bengal, *The Marginal Men*, "The rehabilitation of Punjab refugees was undertaken with the zeal of a man who knew that he could not neglect the issue and stay in power."

But in the case of the Bengali Hindu refugees, Nehru applied an altogether different yardstick, he vehemently opposed any effort at "rehabilitation" and pushed for according only temporary shelter. Chakrabarti argued thus, "Nehru never ceased to rant against such a solution [exchange of population in the eastern sector] although he had precisely accepted such a solution in Punjab. An exchange of population was not a communal solution. It was the inevitable consequence of partition of India on a communal basis...".

Mookerjee's purpose in insisting that Bengal be partitioned and not handed over in its entirety to bring to fruition Jinnah's dream of a consolidated Pakistan, saved Kolkata and the Bengali Hindus and ensured for them a spatial contour where they could live and thrive in free India. His refusal to go along with the pipe dream of a "united sovereign Bengal" floated by HS Suhrawardy and the ageing Sarat Bose, ensured that West Bengal survived as a separate entity. However, his early death and the lack of a cohesive leadership in West Bengal which could continue speaking and working for the Bengali Hindus, altered the political dynamics. In fact, his narrative of ensuring West Bengal as a space for Bengali Hindus has been systematically eroded, and he himself relegated by the comrades, the Congress and the Trinamool Congress as a communal figure best left untouched and uncelebrated.

In the last four decades, the dynamics of Bengal politics has further altered especially its demographic and denominational dimensions. In three odd decades that it had ruled West Bengal, the Communist Party of India (Marxist)-led Left Front assiduously worked to change the demography of the State. Much like the Congress in Assam, the CPI(M) in West Bengal allowed and encouraged infiltration from Bangladesh, looked the other way when such an influx generated social and denominational tensions and used the official State system to officialise the infiltrators and cede them political space and voice. The Bengali Hindus who came over as refugees were coerced into silence with the threat of being pushed out.

While presiding over one of the biggest de-industrialisation movement in the history of India or perhaps the world, while initiating the process of an acute politicisation of an entire education system, while perpetrating one of the most violent political culture that spit on India's democratic aspirations, the CPI(M) also incubated Islamist groups and formations that indulged in political brigandage and lumpenism in order to sustain the communist brand of liberation politics. So consumed were the comrades with this radicalisation of West Bengal, so captive were they to Islamist vote-banks that, as a rule they glossed over any incident — much the same way West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee does now which adversely affected the Bengali Hindu. Thus, rapes and assault on Hindu women in fields in villages along the border drew from the patrician comrade Jyoti Basu, the derisive question, “Why do they go there?” Comrade Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, must to his chagrin, was forced to retract a statement he had made on the mushrooming of illegal madrassas along the West Bengal border and the threat they posed to national security.

Taslina Nasreen's hounding in 2007 was of course one of the last and most grotesque manifestation of the result of appeasement politics in

West Bengal during the CPI(M) rule. Deganga pogrom in 2010, where Hindu places of worship were vandalised and Hindus prevented from observing Durga Puja, indicated the nadir that had been reached. It was a TMC MP who had fanned the fires in Deganga and thus Ms Banerjee too, along with the comrades, kept silent. Both the TMC and the CPI(M) have been, as subsequent events have proved, complicit in the neglect and marginalisation of the Bengali Hindus in West Bengal, using them as pawns in their power games and doing precious little for their collective welfare and empowerment.

Even in the Kaliachak incident, the CPI(M) politbureau which otherwise passes resolutions on all and sundry issues, was silent, talking only of law and order and of course, as is its obsession, blaming the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Bharatiya Janata Party! The Congress, as a marginal player in West Bengal since 1977, has of course gone along with this marginalisation of Bengali Hindus, ignoring the legacies of BC Roy, Surendra Mohan Ghose and others.

Ms Banerjee has out shone the CPI(M) in its own game of radicalising Bengal's political space. Kaliachak is the latest symptom of this radicalisation. The TMC's welcoming and sheltering rabid elements of the Bangladesh Jamaat, its silence on the Khagragarh blasts Ms Banerjee's ridiculous bamboo-like statement that India's external intelligence agencies were behind it revealed her actual state of mind the TMC's patronage of Islamist lumpens who changed sides after the 2011 Assembly elections — one may recall how the Mamata Government gave permission for a massive rally organised by a section of TMC's minority leadership in March 2013 in the heart of Kolkata in support of the Jamaat in Bangladesh her repeated refusal to condemn attacks on Hindus, their localities, markets and homes, is in fact intensifying and expediting the radicalisation of West Bengal. Yet, post Kaliachak, no Bengali intellectual

dared condemn the episode, or write letters against it to the President of India complaining of intolerance, nor did they take out candle marches or castigate the Chief Minister, these are obviously reserved for the plebeian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and not for the Tagore-loving, easel-handling and Islamist-abetting Ms Banerjee!

West Bengal is again at a crossroads with its very *raison d'être* facing a formidable challenge.

<http://www.anirbanganguly.in/2016/01/20/old-new-crisis-bengal-faces/>

THE MAN AND HIS CONVICTION

Syama Prasad Mookerjee never bowed to Nehruvian pressures when it came to the larger good of the country

Making an assessment of Syama Prasad Mookerjee's life and personality, sometime in 1959, S Radhakrishnan, then Vice President of India, had perhaps come nearest to describing the essential and defining character trait of the late leader, when he wrote that "in his public life", Mookerjee, "was never afraid of expressing his inmost convictions."

Such a dauntless power, the philosopher statesman argued, was becoming rare because of the rising habit in our public life of maintaining an unconcerned, or interest-induced silence in face of oppression, injustice or plain lies. "In silence", Radhakrishnan reminded his readers, "the cruelest lies are told. When great wrongs are committed it is criminal to be silent in the hope that truth will one day find its voice. In a democratic society one should speak out, especially when we are developing an unequalled power of not seeing what we do not wish to see."

It was his capacity to speak out and to hold out the truth against the overwhelming and forceful unilateral blinkers that the Nehruvian establishment sought to impose on the newly emerging democratic polity in India, that made Mookerjee stand out among his peers and leave a lasting impression on those who came in touch with him or formed part of his multifaceted national action.

Mookerjee struck as outstanding even those who did not necessarily subscribe to his politics. The legendary British Quaker, pacifist and Gandhian, Horace Alexander, for instance, considered him to be "after Rajagopalachari", the "ablest man in Indian politics", one of those rare

leaders who combined in himself energy, political expediency and realism. Alexander hoped that India would rather have more of Mookerjee's kind of political realism than a certain opacity that would soon become the hallmark of the Nehruvian epoch

His ability to strike out a new path or line against the prevailing tendencies and notions of the age endeared him to many a leading mind of his era. An overwhelmed Rabindranath Tagore saw the coming of "a veritable change of climate over" the "educational world" in the country and "the dry branch that had withered away at the wintry touch of Western influence festively putting forth fresh foliage", when Mookerjee, as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Calcutta, hammering away at calcified colonial convention, invited him to deliver the Convocation Address in Bengali in 1937.

Mookerjee's contribution in other fields, apart from politics, was striking as well, bringing him out as a leader with a vision that was in tune with a rising and an aspiring India. Under the exigencies and rigours of quotidian politics and under the compulsions of an *idée fixe* when it comes to his ideological formulations, these other aspects of his thoughts and contemplations have often been overlooked or obscured.

His keenness to see cutting-edge research in the field of nuclear energy, for example, was an expression of his will to see India self-reliant. In 1948, while inaugurating the Institute of Nuclear Physics in Calcutta, Mookerjee displayed a deep insight into the future of India's energy needs when he said, referring to the "peace-time applications of atomic energy" that "it places in the hands of man a source of power limitless in quantity, transportable to every region of the world and usable for every need of mankind." In trying to harness this mighty source of energy, Mookerjee pointed out, "India cannot remain a mere spectator, particularly when she has all the raw materials in plenty for the development of atomic energy"

and especially when “within our own lifetime, we may find the results of atomic energy research affecting all the phases of human life.”

But Mookerjee was perhaps his eloquent best when dilating on the theme of Indian education. His convocation speeches delivered all across India and over decades read like a veritable discussion on the challenges, potential and future of Indian education. They reveal a mind in relentless quest and pursuit of educational excellence in India, a mind which dreamt of re-igniting and unleashing the deeper dimensions and potentials of the essential Indian mind, long cramped within the confines of an alien education framework.

He was hinting at a future framework and goal of indigenous education in a free India when Mookerjee told a young audience that Indian universities, if they were to “play their role in the rebuilding of new India, must not regard themselves as exclusive institutions which exist apart from the currents of the country’s life” and would have to “saturate” their alumni with “lessons of India’s history and civilisation” and “instill into them unity and reason, strength and dauntlessness, and inspire them with skill and knowledge and teach them to apply themselves” to national service.

It is as a tribute to Mookerjee’s indomitable conviction and irrepressible democratic spirit that for the first time since independence, this July 6, his 113th birth anniversary, the political thought and vision that he launched and strove to establish against overwhelming odds has finally assumed unalloyed power and primacy. Such a decisive change does present an opportunity of finally drawing-up his vision of India in freedom.

<http://www.anirbanganguly.in/2014/07/04/the-man-and-his-conviction-2/>

A TRIBUTE TO CULTURAL RECONSTRUCTION

The so-called intellectual mainstream relegated SP Mookerjee to an ideological corner and suppressed his versatility, his national acceptance and his vision for national progress.

Sixty one years after he was consigned to a confined and lonely death by free India's first democratically elected Government on June 23, 1953, Syama Prasad Mookerjee's dream and vision of creating an alternate political stream and narrative in India has finally achieved fruition. The question as to why a personality of his stature and dimension, who had nothing but India's supreme national interest in mind and who strove to establish the democratic experiment in India on a firm footing, met with such an end is one of those lingering and unexplained episodes in India's history which still await their moment of truth. Ironically, this unraveling of the truth was suppressed simply because the self-professed democrats of that era, belonging to a particular ideological hue, all Mookerjee's contemporaries and colleagues in national politics, displayed a staunch aversion to unraveling the truth behind his death in detention.

Mookerjee's evaluation in the field of politics has somewhat been done, but even here the so-called intellectual 'mainstream' relegated him to an ideological corner and suppressed his versatility, his national acceptance and his encompassing vision for national progress. Rarely was there a leader who displayed such dexterity in varied fields such as education, culture, politics, parliamentary affairs and administration. Generations today would perhaps scarcely believe that in each of these fields Mookerjee attained the pinnacle and that too in such a short and action packed life.

Leaving his politics aside here, it is indeed fascinating to see the

civilisational vision that Mookerjee exuded. As president of the Mahabodhi Society of India, he had long anticipated the need to revive India's civilisational ties in her neighbourhood. Long before the 'Look East Policy' had been conceived, Mookerjee looked to South-East Asia and as the carrier of Buddha's message sought to bind the region in a civilisation knot with its mother country, India. In his reminiscence, Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee in Indo-China, JM Majumdar, for example, describes how the then Cambodian monarch, Norodom Sihanouk, welcomed Mookerjee and the Relics of Buddha's chief disciples as an "immense 'Kusala' for our country and people to have henceforth a direct bond with Lord Buddha owing to the arrival of the sacred relics." In reply Mookerjee spoke of how despite passing through "varying fortunes, good and bad", the "ancient land of Cambodia and many other adjoining countries still bear the indestructible signs of the heritage that have come from our Motherland, Bharat, since time immemorial."

But his action was not limited to these exchanges alone, one of the legends in the study of Indian art, Stella Kramrisch, in her assessment of Dr. S.P. Mookerjee and Indian Art, mentioned how he worked indefatigably to establish the study of Indian history and culture in the University of Calcutta and set up one of the earliest museums of Indian art and supported some of the best scholars of the epoch to carry out research on India's past. As Kramrisch noted, "art mattered to him and he in turn left his mark not on the history, but on the future of art in India." The deeper objective of Mookerjee's cultural activism, however, was to bring about a larger cultural reconstruction in India, as he spelt it out once in one of his presidential addresses to the Asiatic Society, "Let me emphasise that I do not at all minimise the need for a radical reorientation of the economic and industrial policy of India. A country whose educational and economic backwardness is a standing disgrace to human civilisation has got to be placed on her feet again and its people must get fullest advantage

of its inexhaustible raw materials. But let me state at the same time that neither can India attain her full strength and glory nor can she contribute worthily to the cause of stabilising human civilisation, if we ignore the need for a proper cultural reconstruction in India.”

The eventual working out of that ‘cultural reconstruction in India’ would perhaps be another lasting tribute to Mookerjee and to his fascinating life and legacy.

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