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## UNIT 5 DHURJATI PRASAD MUKERJI\*

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### 5.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit you will be able to:

- describe the contributions of Dhurjati Prasad Mukerji;
- outline the biographical details of Dhurjati Prasad Mukerji;
- explain some of his central ideas in sociology; and
- list some of his important works.

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### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

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In Unit 1, you learnt about the emergence of sociology in India. We gave you a broad outline of how sociology came to be established as a discipline in Indian universities. You learnt about the role played by several Indian and foreign scholars in the development of sociology and its link with social anthropology and Indology. You have thus obtained a broad idea of the background in which sociology developed in India.

In units 3 and 4, we dealt with the contributions of two sociologists: Radhakamal Mukerjee and G. S. Ghurye. They worked during a time when the spirit of freedom was alive in the soul of every Indian. The National Movement was part of the background of these scholars and critically shaped

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their writings. In this unit we will discuss the life and work of D P Mukerji. Section 5.3 gives a biographical sketch of D. P. Mukerji. Section 5.3 describes the central ideas of D M Mukerji and Section 5.4 provides the important works.

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## 5.2 BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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D. P. Mukerji was a Marxist who analysed Indian history in terms of a dialectical process. Tradition and modernity, colonialism and nationalism, individualism and collectivism could be seen as dialectically interacting with each other. Here we will give you a biographical sketch of D. P. Mukerji. This will help you to understand his central ideas in their proper perspective.

Dhurjati Prasad Mukerji was popularly known as “D. P. ”. He was born in 1894 in a middle class Brahmin family of Bengal. It was during this period that the literary influence of Rabindranath Tagore, Bankim Chandra and Sarat Chandra Chatterjee was at its peak. There was renaissance of Bengali literature at this time.

D. P. Mukerji did his graduation from Bangbasi College, Bengal. First he was a student of history which included economics at that time, then he took a degree in economics. He was a man of letters in Bengali and wrote some fiction also but he did not pursue this line for long. He did not confine to the boundaries of a particular discipline. It was perhaps for this reason that he became a sociologist, as Sociology is the most comprehensive social science. He attained not only national but international fame as a sociologist.

In 1922 he joined the Lucknow University as a lecturer in Economics and Sociology. He was in his own words a Marxologist. His roots in middle class Brahmin family led him instinctively to blend Marxism with Indian tradition. D. P. Mukerji always thought that ideas of Karl Marx were relevant in India when adapted to conditions of Indian history and tradition. He, therefore, always emphasised the study of social processes and social movements.

He was born in the golden age of criticism and reflected this age in true senses in his own work. To every subject he brought critical criteria from as many fields as possible. He had the faculty of looking at every problem from a new angle. He was an art critic, music critic, a drama critic and a critic of life. In him we find a blend of Anglo-Bengalee culture.

D. P. Mukerji was a man of aesthetic sensibilities. He was interested in style, even in the style of his dress. He was a slim man who disliked gaining even an extra pound of weight. In thinking also he hated padding or writing anything superfluous or irrelevant. His style of writing was sharp, spare and incisive. He was a sophisticated man who rarely revealed his emotions. For him, emotions should not be exhibited but should be fused with the intellectual process.

He loved to be a teacher and was very popular amongst his students. He encouraged dialogue and interchange of ideas with his students. Thus, he was

co-student, a co-enquirer who never stopped learning. He was such an influence on his students that he lived in the minds of his students even after his death.

For some time D. P. Mukerji became the Director of Information when the Congress assumed office in U.P. His influence brought the spirit of an intellectual approach to public relations. He was also part of the foundation of the Bureau of Economics and Statistics. He returned in 1939 to the Lucknow University when Congress relinquished office on the war issue at the beginning of the Second World War. In 1947 he was appointed as a member of U. P. Labour Inquiry Committee. It was in 1951 that he was made a professor. This was a late recognition but D. P. never felt bitter about it.

A year before his retirement at Lucknow, in 1953, he was invited to head the Department of Economics at Aligarh. He stayed there for five years. He went to The Hague as a visiting professor of sociology at the International Institute of Social Studies. He was a founder member of the Indian Sociological Association and one of the members of its Managing Committee and its Editorial Board. He also represented the association at the International Sociological Association of which he became the Vice President.

He wrote several books and articles in diverse fields. After Independence he watched political movements with great interest but was not a politician in any sense. He was influenced by two national leaders, Rafi Ahmad Kidwai and Jawaharlal Nehru. He used to correspond with Nehru. As an intellectual he did not have a cloistered mind. He brought refinement to his subject. He was influenced by many but till the end he remained a scholar who influenced many others. He died of throat cancer in 1962. But as stated earlier, he survives through his students.

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## **5.3 CENTRAL IDEAS**

Marxism, according to D. P. Mukerji, helped one to understand the historical developments well but it could not offer a satisfactory solution to human problems. That solution was to be found in the regeneration and reinterpretation of India's national culture. He was opposed to the positivism of modern social sciences which reduced individuals into biological or psychological units. The industrial culture of the West had turned individuals into self-seeking agents; the society in the West had become ethnocentric. By emphasising individuation (i. e. , recognition of the roles and rights of the individual) positivism had uprooted the social anchors of humanity.

### **5.3.1 Role of Tradition in Indian Society**

Mukerji held that tradition was the mainspring of culture. The individuals drew their nourishment from the tradition. They did not lose a sense of purposes or direction. But tradition often became a deadweight, as in India. Also, people made fetish of it, that is, they idealised it and worshipped it. Cultural stagnation was bound to result on account of the people's uncritical

attitude towards it. Therefore, individuation must also be encouraged. The individuals can recreate culture by infusing it with new vigour. The individual is to be neither totally free nor un-free. For the evolution of a healthy personality, there must be a balance between individuation and sociation. Sociation is the bond of the individual with society. Individual's freedom must not be anarchy but a creative expression of the tradition.

### 5.3.2 Integrated Development of Personality

Mukerji did not commend to Indians the positivistic construction of personality. The Western personality made a fetish of achievement. Science and technology had been harnessed to great improvements in the living conditions of masses. The capacity of human beings to control nature and use it to their advantage are notable achievements of the modern age. However, the Western approach could not lead to an integrated development. For an integrated development of personality there was need for a balance between technological development and human freedom. Even a socialist society such as Soviet Russia had failed to evolve a balanced personality. There, the individuals had been dominated by the state or the political party.

D. P. Mukerji's dialecticism was rooted in humanism which cut across narrow ethnic or national consideration. In the West, the individuals had become either aggressive or docile. The Western progress was devoid of humanism. The Renaissance and Industrial Revolution had freed individuals from the grip of stagnant medieval tradition but at the same time reduced the humanist content of progress. The modern nationalism is essentially nurtured in the positivistic aspects of the West. It could not be an appropriate model for India. Besides, India's middle classes were a product of Western impact on India. They were uprooted from their own indigenous tradition. They had lost contact with the masses. India could become a modern nation if the middle classes re-established their links with the masses. Only then a genuine development was possible. For D. P. Mukerji growth was a mere quantitative achievement, development was a qualitative term denoting value-based progress.

### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Briefly describe D. P. Mukerji's idea of Sociology.

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- 2) According to D P Mukerji, what are the pre-requisites for integrated personality?

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### 5.3.3 D. P. Mukerji's Views on Unity in Diversity

D. P. Mukerji was involved in depicting Hindu-Muslim relations. His search for truth led him to discover humanistic and spiritual unity in the diversities of Indian culture. He was examining many of the areas within the broad framework of Hindu-Muslim interaction. There were three areas of interaction which were worthy of note. i) Politically, the Islamic kings ruled over the Hindu subjects from eleventh to seventeenth centuries A. D. in North India. At the same time, there were established alliances between Muslim rulers and Hindu rajas. Hence, there was a sense of partnership between Muslim rulers and Hindu subjects; this was more evident during the Mughal rule. ii) In economic relations, during the Islamic rule while the jagirdars (military chiefs) were Muslims, most of the zamindars were Hindus. These two groups shared many interests in common. Thus, together these two classes formed an alliance. iii) Culturally, in literature, music, costumes, cultivation of fine arts, etc., there were reciprocal influences. Both Sufism and Bhaktism in the north encouraged mutual interactions. However, the Muslims and Hindus differed in their world view.

Mukerji noted that the Hindu mind thought in terms of cycles: the good and the bad succeeded each other. The Hindus had a fatalistic view. Further, the Hindu world view was the product of a distinctive territory, a subcontinent. Islam by contrast was a multi-ethnic, multi-national religion. Hindu approach to nationhood was idealistic, Islamic approach was pragmatic. For the Hindu freedom was a "birth right"; for the Muslim it was an opportunity. The Muslim view was non-cyclic and non-fatalistic. Hence the Muslim view favoured direct action to make the best use of a political crisis or opportunity.

### 5.3.4 D. P. Mukerji as an Economist

D. P. Mukerji was by training an economist. His approach to economics was, however, distinct from that of other economists. He viewed the economic development in India in terms of historical and cultural specificities. The economic forces in India were influenced by social values. During ancient times, the king and the members of royal court did not own the lands. The powers conferred on the king were limited to fiscal obligations; that is to say, the tillers of land had to give a portion of their produce to the treasury as tax or revenue in return for the royal protection. The ownership of the land was mainly vested in the village councils. During the heyday of Buddhism, the Sangha (monastic organisation) often managed extensive lands, which were granted to them by kings. Although the individual monks (Bhikshus) could not possess or own property, the Sangha owned properties. One-sixth of the agricultural produce called as tax by the Sangha was utilised for the cultivation of learning and pursuit of ethical and spiritual goals.

Just as village lands were controlled by kin and caste groups, which were internally autonomous, even trade and banking in India were managed by kinship and caste networks in pre-modern times. The guilds which carried on

regional trade were usually based on castes. Commercial banking was also controlled by castes. There were important money-lending Hindu families on the West coast whose influence was widespread especially during Mughal rule. Mukerji did not treat the merchants as mere parasites; on the contrary, he regarded them as those who established trade networks between urban centres and rural hinterland. But during the colonial rule they began exploiting as they shed their earlier cultural constraints. The Indian merchant princes often travelled to foreign countries to display their wares; thereby they linked India to the outside world not only through trade but through the spread of culture.

The British rule in India brought about widespread changes in Indian economy. The urban-industrial economy introduced by the British set aside not only the older institutional networks but also the traditional classes. This called for a new social adaptation. In the new set-up the educated middle classes of India's urban centres became the focal point of society.

However, these middle classes were dominated by Western life styles and thinking. The future of India would be secure if the middle classes reached out to the masses and established an active partnership with them in nation-building.

**Box 5.1: Rise of the Middle Class in India**

..[T]he British moved in with their totally alien form of economy based on money and mechanical production. They destroyed indigenous merchant capital, trade and commerce, self-sufficient rural economy, and traditional panchayat. They introduced new land-settlement based on the concepts of private property and profit, generated physical and occupational mobility in a hitherto more or less static society, and imposed on Indians and educational system with English as the medium of instruction. The new land-revenue system produced the category of absentee landlords- the main pillar of strength of British in rural India. These landlords remained divorced from both agricultural productivity and responsibility towards villagers. Similarly, English education gave birth to a class, who wouldn't support the colonial masters and were psychologically and socially distant from the majority of Indians who did not know English. These two classes-the landlords and the literati formed the new middle class, who were absolutely alienated from the language and culture of people. [...] (Chakrabarti 2010: 237-238).

## 5.4 IMPORTANT WORKS

Some of the important sociological works of D. P. Mukerji are:

- a) *Basic Concepts in Sociology* (1932)
- b) *Personality and the Social Sciences* (1924)
- c) *Modern Indian Culture* (1942)
- d) *Problems of Indian Youths* (1946)
- e) *Diversities* (1958)



Out of these books, *Modern Indian Culture* (1942) and *Diversities* (1958) are his best known works. His versatility can be seen from his other contributions too, such as, his books,

- a) *Tagore: A Study* (1943)
- b) *On Indian History* (1943)
- c) *Introduction to Indian Music* (1943)

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) In what way was Mukerji's approach to economics different from that of other economists?

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- 2) Give the names of the two of D. P. Mukerji's major works in sociology.

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## 5.5 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we discussed the biographical details of the D P Mukerji. We have described some of his major ideas in the field of sociology. His ideas on the role of tradition in Indian society, integrated development of personality, and unity in diversity are referred to by many sociologists. Finally, we have listed some of the important works of the three thinkers.

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## 5.6 REFERENCES

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## 5.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) D. P. Mukerji was keenly interested in social processes taking place in a rapidly changing society like India. He was a Professor of sociology at Lucknow University which he had joined in 1922. He was trained in both economics and history and he combined sociology with economics and

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history. He called himself a Marxologist due to his belief that Marx's ideas were very relevant when adapted to Indian history and civilisation.

- 2) According to D. P. Mukerji, for an integrated development of personality there was need for a balance between technological development and human freedom.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Mukerji's approach to economics was distinct from that of other economists. He viewed the economic development in India in terms of historical and cultural specificities
- 2) Two of his important works are:
  - a) *Modern Indian Culture* (1942)
  - b) *Diversities* (1958)

