

Social Change in India

Reconsidering Ramkrishna Mukherjee

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With Ramkrishna Mukherjee's study of social change in India, a scholar of his standing deserves to be read seriously, not ignored or praised without an engagement with his writings. An exposition of his formulations is followed by their critical examination, including his concept of "soft spots."

Ramkrishna Mukherjee provides many narratives of social change in India. It is useful to recognise them. Four such narratives are identified here. Two of these narratives belong to his early writings, and each of the remaining two narratives belongs to his later writings and his last writings, respectively. Together, they cover a working life of more than 50 years, from 1948–2006. They cover a long span of time in Indian society, from the appearance of the East India Company (henceforth, the Company) in 1608, to 2008, the year when the land issue in West Bengal became important and the partial implementation of the Mandal Commission report in India took place. This article presents briefly these narratives, followed by comments towards their critical evaluation.

East India Company

The Rise and Fall of the East India Company (1974) is the result of a course of lectures that Mukherjee gave as a guest professor at the Institute for Indian Studies of the Humboldt University in Berlin during the autumn term of 1953–54. The book was published in Berlin originally in 1955. He makes it clear in his introductory comments that his book is not meant to be a historical study, but a sociological appraisal of social forces behind the rise and fall of the Company and their impact on India in particular. He draws from the facts collected by historians and other scholars, claiming no originality in historical material. His study provides a sociological study of the Company from its formation to its decline.

In developing his argument, he contends against two prevailing views. He faces, on the one hand, the general European view that the Company played a positive role in India, even though the

creation of the Indian Empire was not the result of a clear design. Among the "priceless gifts" of the Company to the people of India were "political unity," "assured peace," and the "reign of law" in place of the arbitrary will of despots. If there were instances of deviation from the good intentions that the Company had for the people of India, these were isolated instances of deviation arising from ignorance about "oriental" mentality and "native" customs. There were also instances of failure on the part of individuals in its employment who failed to live up to their duty in looking after the interests of the Company as well as the people living under its rule.

The second view of the Company, on the other hand, sees its role in a differentiated manner—from its birth in 1600 up to the close of the 17th century as a company representing a group of peaceful merchants. The battle of Plassey in 1757 gave full shape to the transformation of the Company from a group of peaceful merchants to ambitious rulers, filling them with ambition for the territorial acquisition of the entire country. This ambition made them greedy and tyrannical. Such a view, notes Mukherjee, has been so common that it finds acceptance even among Indian historians.

Mukherjee sees the rise of the Company in the historical context. He sees its origin in the context of the rise of English merchant capital, the prime mover of a "new civilisation" that came into existence with the break-up of feudalism, which took a monopolistic character from the beginning. Trade monopoly was a characteristic demand of these merchant companies. The Company had to contend with competition for lucrative commercial gain from other merchants in its country, which was resolved in its favour. In the European context, the need for trade monopoly meant rivalry between merchant companies of different nations for "colonial trade" and, in the end, meant the acquisition of political power in "purchasing" countries to ensure trading privileges.

In the case of India, it was the English company that succeeded in this endeavour

An earlier draft of this article was presented at a conference commemorating Ramkrishna Mukherjee that was organised by Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata, 28–29 March 2016. The proceedings of the conference are due to appear as a book. For his personal communication, I am thankful to Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, and for comments on the article, my thanks go to Andre Beteille, Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, and T N Madan.

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through various measures, including open wars, and took advantage of it. It was only when the merchant interest was superseded by the British industrial bourgeoisie that the typical monopolistic company of merchant capital went into decline. Such is the story, in its barest outline, of the Company that appeared in India in 1608 and was forced to liquidate itself in 1858.

Mukherjee goes into some details about how the Company manoeuvred the country's strong central power to gain a footing, and how it took advantage of the disintegration of this central power. The inherent weakness of the Indian feudal structure contributed to its success. The reckless extraction of the wealth of the country by the Company, its officials and underlings, turned the one-time "Granary of the East" into a land of the destitute. This phase in the life of the Company gave full vent to the character of merchant capital. After more than a century of such a rule, faced by British industrial capital, the Company seemed to have spent its power and appeared to be an obstruction to the full play of British capitalism in the colony.

On Rural Bengal

During 1948 and 1949, Mukherjee published two papers in the *American Sociological Review*, "Economic Structure of Rural Bengal: A Survey of Six Villages" and "The Economic Structure and Social Life in Six Villages of Bengal." They were based on his study of these villages in the district of Bogra in North Bengal in 1942 and 1945. Comparative data from 12 villages from the district of Birbhum was also considered. Later, in 1958, a full report was published. Meanwhile, he published *The Dynamics of a Rural Society* in 1957 (Mukherjee 2012b), which drew from his study of these Bengal villages and added to them a historical perspective.

Mukherjee (1948) shows in his paper that, even though the average income of villages in Bengal was low due to primitive techniques of agricultural production, there is a well-defined income hierarchy to be found among villagers. He sees clearly three ranks of family occupations. The upper rank consists of

subfeudatory landlords and the relatively prosperous peasantry, as well as those persons who are in well-paid positions or engage in large-scale trade with interest in land. The middle rank consists mainly of the self-sufficient peasantry and others, such as artisans and small traders, who maintain a somewhat self-sufficient existence partly based on land. The lower rank consists of the remaining occupational groups who depend on working for others or even begging. He finds a statistically significant difference between the three ranks in terms of per capita expenditure and other economic indicators.

Moreover, these occupational groups indicate not only the generally recognised positions in rural society, but also the production relations of these groups. The upper rank own land, the principal means of production in an agrarian economy, and employ the labour power of others. The persons in the middle principally produce for themselves and employ their own labour, and the persons of the lower rank possess no or little land, living mainly by selling their labour power. Data from the rest of rural Bengal indicate that the economic structure overall is similar to that shown by these six villages.

This economic structure is mainly responsible for the poor condition of the rural economy, for the upper rank have no incentive to develop production techniques. With the pressure on land being considerable in view of the poor development of industry, the upper rank benefit from cheap labour. Further, they can compel the impoverished peasantry to work as sharecroppers on their land, which, according to Mukherjee, gives them a better margin of profit than what they would get by hiring daily wage labour.

A study of the economic structure over time, from 1922 to 1942, shows the extent of the disintegration of the old system in a subsistence economy. There was slight movement from the middle rank to the upper rank, but considerably so from the middle rank to the lower rank, accentuating inequality. The changes taking place between 1942 and 1945 could be studied directly. He found that 33% of the families in the middle rank

in 1942 had sunk into the lower rank in 1945 and, within the lower rank, 10% of the families had been further impoverished. The *Gazetteer* of Bogra district confirms that there is growing "prosperity" of the landowning class and increasing impoverishment over time of the bulk of peasantry, who are being reduced to the position of sharecroppers and agricultural labourers.

In his second paper, Mukherjee (1949) shows the effects of economic changes on a few major social institutions in these villages. He finds that caste hierarchy does reflect to a certain extent the division of people into separate economic units. Thus, he finds that all the upper-caste Hindu families (Brahmins, Kayasthas, and their half-castes) are found in the upper rank of the economic structure, and 83% of the Scheduled Caste families are found in the lower rank, and the rest in the middle rank. The "joint family" is found more among the upper rank, the "simple family" (parents and dependent children) more among the lower rank, with the middle rank behaving as a group between the two. Literacy is of a poor standard, and, whatever little education there is, it is confined mainly to the upper rank. The corresponding proportions are as follows: in the upper rank, 56%; in the middle rank, 13%; and, in the lower rank, only 9% (Mukherjee 1949: 420).

Mukherjee (2012b) takes the argument forward in *The Dynamics of a Rural Society*. The central argument of the book is that the dynamics of a society, even a primitive peasant society, cannot be revealed without a close analysis of its economic structure. For Bengal, Mukherjee finds that under the British rule a new relationship grew between the propertied and propertyless classes at the expense of the self-sufficient peasantry of the pre-British time.

This new relationship had a particularly "retrogressive" character, for the growth of the landholder (*jotdar*)–sharecropper (*bagadar*) relationship just maintained the form of peasant cultivation, when, in effect, the relation of production was made suitable for the new function of commodity production. The landholders functioned as rent-receivers by taking a

share of the produce from the cultivators. The concentration of land in fewer hands did not lead to improvements in agricultural production, for under colonial rule a progressive development of the agrarian economy was ruled out. The landlords remained satisfied as semi-feudal rent-receivers and thrived on the increasing appropriation of the surplus labour of the peasantry.

Against the opinion that the ever-increasing growth of sharecroppers indicated the emergence of capitalism in the agriculture of Bengal, Mukherjee argues that capitalism does not merely mean the disintegration of the peasantry and the concentration of land in the hands of a few. Capitalism in agriculture means a fundamental change from feudal society, involving better organisation of the agrarian economy through large-scale farming and mechanisation. This did not happen in Bengal under colonial conditions. On the contrary, the landowning class continued to thrive on the rent received from the land without any investment in it. This arrangement was strengthened over time. Thus, in 1943, during the famine, a large section of the peasantry not only lost land and other means of production like draught cattle, but was also forced to borrow grains year after year for survival, not to speak of borrowing grains as seeds for production.

Mukherjee (2012b: 57–58) concludes:

the agrarian crisis was due to the colonial system imposed on the country and the role of the parasitic landowning class as an appendage to that system, whereby their profit-motive could find ample satisfaction while preserving the ‘peasant’ cultivation without any capital outlay in order to improve the state of the productive forces. However industrious the mass of the peasantry might have been and whether or not they wanted to revolutionise agricultural production, the heavy burden of rents and interests on their head and their accelerated pauperisation could never allow them to check the crisis and improve the agrarian economy so long as the parasitic landowning class maintained its role in the production-relations.

The landlords dominated the society in ideological terms as well. Thus, instead of a progressive change in their outlook, people in the lower social strata remained steeped in the notion of caste

and communal segregation. This made it difficult to organise them on progressive lines. In the words of L S S O’Malley, whom Mukherjee quotes,

The idea of a class war is alien to a people which believes that the social hierarchy is divinely ordained and that equality is not only contrary to experience but is impossible because each man’s state of life is predetermined by his actions in past lives. (2012b: 126)

Post Independence

For understanding Mukherjee on social change in India after independence, it is useful to begin with *The Sociologist and Social Change in India Today* (1965). In this book, he brings together six papers, including the one under the same title that had appeared in the *Sociological Bulletin* in 1962. It carries a Foreword and two Resumes.

In these papers, especially the ones on urbanisation and refugees, he draws from enormous data:

- (i) A sample survey, under the title, “Changes in Family Structures—Urban/Rural—West Bengal,” conducted under his guidance by the Sociological Research Unit of the Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta, during 1960–61. This was a part of the study sponsored by the Research Programmes Committee, Planning Commission, Government of India. The sample survey covered the cities of Calcutta and Howrah, four towns of Adra, Berhampore, Contai and Siliguri, and 20 villages in West Bengal.
- (ii) A study of the social structure of Durgapur and Giridih townships conducted under his guidance by the Sociological Research Unit of the Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta.
- (iii) A study of villages around Giridih township conducted since 1958 under his guidance by the Sociological Research Unit of the Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta, that had already covered by then more than 500 villages within a radial distance of 15 miles from the township.
- (iv) An earlier study conducted under his guidance by the Sociological Research Unit of the Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta, on different industrial locations.
- (v) A study of East Pakistan Hindu refugees found living in Calcutta in 1962,

conducted under his guidance by the Sociological Research Unit of the Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta, covering their present and their orientation towards the immediate future.

(vi) He also draws from National Sample Survey data for West Bengal from different rounds.

The context of the book, as his Foreword makes clear, is the process of change and associated problems in the country. To motivate people to change in the desired direction so that they need not be induced from above by efforts such as programmes and projects under different five-year plans—this is the crux of the matter. It has to be kept in mind that the assumption that if conditions for economic development are created, social change would follow is not borne by evidence. It is also not confirmed that educated persons are always precursors of change. Indeed, they may be relatively more conservative to the extent of resisting change.

Does it mean, then, that such a process as urbanisation has no social impact? Mukherjee recognises that urbanisation is taking place in the country. Rural–urban differences do exist with respect to physical characteristics, density of population, utilisation of land, and economic organisation with its impact on social stratification. Indeed, towns can serve the role of a “bridge” between cities and villages.

Such a concept as rural–urban continuum, therefore, is valid in this respect, and it can serve as a policy tool as well. He admits that these differences have bearing upon the material well-being of the people and their resultant cultural attainments. When it comes to the urban versus the rural way of life, though, especially with respect to the joint family and caste, which are believed to be antithetical to the urban way of life, these institutions persist with adjustments, without involving a break or even an attempt to break from them or their ideological orientations. With respect to the family as a social institution, there is no evidence pointing towards the emergence of a distinct urban way of life, nor of the loosening of the caste ideology.

What is to be done in such a situation? Mukherjee’s prescription is to identify

“soft spots” through which the desired course of change may be brought about in India. He describes soft spots in the following words: “those vulnerable regions of the social structure through which we may be able to break through the impasse and effect the stipulated course of change” (1965: viii). Why is it important to identify them? His answer is: “the facts show that without such an identification we shall not be able to crystallize our vision from sporadic expression of progress to the ‘social formation’ which is to be the forerunner of the desired course of change in society” (1965: viii). Through these soft spots “social change may be effected on expected to take place in due course” (1965: 109).

He illustrates this point specifically with respect to refugees in Calcutta. His concern is about their rehabilitation. Instead of bemoaning their indolence or inefficiency, he suggests it is important to carry out correct and specific diagnoses.

The first step to be taken is to differentiate between the refugees. He identifies four segments of these refugees: the platform segment, the hovel segment, the colony segment, and the city segment. The segments of platform and hovel were found centred around one of the railway stations of the city. While the platform segment consists of those refugee families that were found squatting on the platform of the railway station, the hovel segment consists of those families that had built small hovels from such material as packing cases and tin sheets in the lawns and lanes around the railway station. The colony segment consists of those families that had settled down in swampy regions of the city, creating “colonies” with distinct names that replicated their previous settlements in East Bengal. The city segment, on the other hand, consists of those families that had settled down in the city without creating any distinction specific to themselves.

These segments are not to be seen as four stages that the refugees passed through sequentially in their assimilation. These segments, on the contrary, represent distinct categories of refugees who came to Calcutta; distinct in terms of the

kind of life they lived and the course of their movement. While refugees in the platform and hovel segments were mainly peasants and artisans rooted in villages to whom city life was unfamiliar, for the majority of the refugees in the colony and city segments, the urban way of life was not unfamiliar. They had contact with the urban economy, some directly with Calcutta, through their engagements with relatively “higher” professions and services or even as landlords and wholesale merchants. The lives of refugees in their original homeland had an influence on the course of their movement. Nineteenth of the refugees in the city and colony samples came directly to Calcutta, whereas only one-tenth of the refugees in the platform and hovel samples did so, trying to settle down at first in rural areas of West Bengal or even other states in India. They were also the ones who were the most reluctant to leave their homeland.

As to distinctions in the economic lives of Calcutta refugees, a clear gradation could be made among them, with the city segment at the top, the colony segment next, followed by the hovel segment, and with the platform segment at the bottom. In terms of the different ways of life exhibited by these refugees in 1962, the platform segment was the least integrated; the hovel segment, though living in Calcutta lived a rather “anachronistic” life; the colony people were yet to be fully integrated, having created “pockets” of East Bengal; and the city segment was the most integrated. Apart from their characterisation of themselves as “displaced persons,” there was hardly any attribute that could classify the city segment as refugees.

Mukherjee makes it clear that the refugee problem can be solved neither by taking a stand that the refugees should be settled in India exactly as they lived in East Bengal, nor by a blanket understanding that all that is needed is for them to be provided with livelihood opportunities. We need to take a differentiated view. The city segment of refugees has taken its position within the middle-class milieu of Calcutta, economically and culturally. They do not need any special consideration as

refugees. Since the colony segment has built its future possibility within the urban economy of Calcutta, the integration of this segment will be further facilitated if civic privileges and responsibilities are extended to these colonies as applicable to other areas of the city. As to the refugees from the hovel and platform segments, they will be best suited for the peasant economy and, in view of their recent experiences, at the fringe of the urban sector in keeping with their training and habit.

Mukherjee draws the following conclusions from his illustrative study. First, although a large number of refugees have been settled within the rural economy, intra-group variations within the refugees on the whole lead us “to diagnose different soft spots in the organism for respective segments and suggest accordingly different measures to solve their problems” (1965: 161). Second, he notes that, while the economic basis of the group under discussion demands primary attention, this need not be true in all cases. Other societal considerations, including value considerations, may play an important role. Third, an attempt at identifying the soft spots of a group may indicate the reactions of people to a course of induced change, leading to greater efficiency in planning and implementing a programme of social development.

On Land

In *The Measure of Time in the Appraisal of Social Reality* (2012a), Mukherjee takes up the land issue in West Bengal in 2008. This was a burning issue at the time when the Left Front government was being opposed for its policy of farmland acquisition for industry. The critical locations of the agitation were Nandigram, where a special economic zone (SEZ) for industrialisation was planned, and Singur, where Tata Motors was setting up a factory for the manufacture of its small car, the Nano. The Tatas were forced to announce in 2008 that they were pulling out of Singur due to continued agitation, shifting to Sanand, Gujarat. The fallout of these agitations was serious for the Left Front. It lost power in the assembly elections of 2011 after being in power for more than 30 years in West Bengal.

Mukherjee notes the changes that have taken place in agriculture in West Bengal since the 1940s. Villages in Bengal, indeed in the whole of India, overwhelmingly subsisted on agriculture, producing one crop a year and depending on locally available resources such as water, fertilisers, implements, and seeds. This elementary stage of agriculture was entirely dependent upon the employment of peasant and animal labour. Land was, thus, the backbone of the rural economy and of the entire state in view of the rudimentary development of the industrial sector.

The situation has changed since. Irrigation projects, fertiliser production, improved seeds for diverse crops, and portable husking machines reaching individual households—all these improvements have meant that the cultivation of two to three high-yielding crops per year on the same plot of land has become a reality. The success of Operation Barga of 1978–82, an ambitious land reforms programme, has contributed to this changed situation. Thus, the rural–urban dichotomy is being replaced by rural–urban continuum. Rural and urban people are less and less identifiable in their distinctness. This relates to the manner in which rural and urban interests intersect with each other. Agriculture needs industrialisation and the urban economy needs further industrialisation for its survival and prosperity. Agriculture is based on land and industry is established on land; both need land. And in West Bengal today, land is a scarce commodity.

Thus, land becomes a central issue in West Bengal. The manner in which this issue is resolved will decide whether “prosperity” or “demise” faces it, for, neither persisting land consciousness in the situation of moribundity, if not deteriorating, economy, nor hastily planned rapid industrialisation can provide the resolution that is needed.

The other issue that he takes up in the book is the caste issue in India in 2008. Critical of the Mandal Commission and its identification of caste as a criterion for the recognition of backwardness in Indian society, he argues that it is not “class in caste,” but “caste in class” that

captures Indian reality the best. Meanwhile, B R Ambedkar’s dream of the removal of economic and social inequality remains a “mirage” (Mukherjee 1965: 40).

Soft Spots

In his Preface to the second edition of *The Dynamics of a Rural Society* (2012b), Mukherjee mentions that D F Pockok found the book an example of conjectural history posed as a scientific study. He also mentions that D D Kosambi wrote to him and praised the book for blending the past with the present to depict the dynamics of a rural society. What Immanuel Wallerstein (1985) writes about Mukherjee’s study of Uganda applies, to my mind, to his studies of Bengal villages as well.

It is difficult to imagine the atmosphere of the times when these studies were written. As in Uganda, so in India, in the words of Wallerstein,

It is important ... to assess once again what really happened in the colonial era if we are to interpret intelligently the current situation. A careful reading of this book will lay the base for just such an intelligent interpretation of the present in the context of the colonial past. (1985: iii)

D N Dhanagare (2007) notes that Mukherjee made a significant contribution at a time when ethnographic research dominated village studies or the studies of peasant societies. He showed that the dynamics of any society, not just agrarian societies, could not be grasped without a historical analysis of its economic structure. Dhanagare takes particular note of Mukherjee’s methodological rigour in his empirical studies and the competence with which he combines it with historical work.

Sabyasachi Bhattacharya wrote an enthusiastic review of *The Rise and Fall of the East India Company* when he was still a student, which he published in a student journal in 1958. He welcomed in this review the comprehensive consideration of the Company from a Marxist point of view, pointing out at the same time that the study was based on secondary sources. In a personal communication to me, he confirms that he stands by this youthful assessment and adds that subsequent research works have confirmed Mukherjee’s general contentions.¹

Mukherjee’s studies deserve intensive engagement. In one such engagement, Mukherjee’s model in *The Dynamics of a Rural Society* has been questioned. “Coming now to the central assumptions of Mukherjee’s model,” it has been argued, “the statistical evidence available from censuses and village surveys does not prove any striking development in the direction of concentration of land-holding and swelling of landless labour. Such a development, leading eventually to the complete disintegration of the self-employed peasantry working on their own farms, hardly seems to have ever been a serious possibility. The class of owner-cultivators is still, by and large, a very substantial element in rural society” (Ray and Ray 1973: 107). This needs to be examined, for, if true, it does create a serious question for Mukherjee. On the other hand, Rajat Ray and Ratna Ray need to be questioned on the strength of their own admission:

No doubt with the growth of rural population and the deepening crisis of agriculture in Bengal since 1920, a number of cultivating families have been reduced each year to sharecroppers and agricultural labourers on their own land (taken over by their creditors), but such a trend has not brought about a radical alteration in the proportion of the classes in village society. (1973: 109)

From Mukherjee’s (1965) study of contemporary India, an attempt may be made now to examine his concept of soft spots. We have seen that for him the identification of soft spots is important, for they offer the possibility to effect social change. He advises that these studies be carried out as diagnostic studies and “the proper method to ascertain the soft spots in the organism under reference in a line similar to that employed for the study of epidemiological problems” (1965: 12). Later, in 1973, in his paper “Indian Sociology: Historical Development and Present Problems,” Mukherjee returns to the problem of soft spots and puts it in the centre of the sociological enterprise. He writes: “what is needed for India (as for any country in the world) is a comprehensive and concerted attempt to identify the soft spots in the social organism, for which all explanatory models and evermore efficient description and explanation of the societal

phenomena and the society itself would be relevant and necessary” (1973: 50). A clarification is offered with reference to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, to whom “the social group identified as the ‘proletariat’ (and not the ‘poor’ per se) represents the soft spot to bring about a revolutionary change in the world society.” He is aware that “in some later Marxist variations, a particular section of the peasantry represents the corresponding soft spot, or it may be additionally or exclusively represented by the ‘nonconformist young intelligentsia’ (Marcuse) and so on” (1973: 49–50).

First, it is not clear whether Mukherjee means, by soft spots, groups or features of groups. While his reference to the proletariat suggests he has groups in mind, his study of the refugees, as seen earlier, suggests that he has some features of groups in mind. Consider the formulation, “the group under reference in order to identify its soft spots” (Mukherjee 1965: 162), or more explicitly, his recommendation “to diagnose different soft spots in the organism for respective segments and suggest accordingly different measures to solve their problems” (1965: 161).

Second, Mukherjee also ignores the fact that for Marx and Engels the proletariat suggests an agency of change based on an explicit theory that they advance on capitalism and its supersession. In the absence of a theory, the diagnosis of soft spots becomes a blind activity. He suggests patience as he is aware that “instead of being unduly impatient, we must accept the fact that the fulfilment of the objective is a time-consuming process, requiring sustained effort and intensive analysis of a clinical nature” (1965: 6). It can be argued that, more than patience, the light that theory can shed is needed even in a clinical examination. How can a doctor make sense of multiple symptoms that a patient shows unless he has a theoretical understanding of possible diseases?

Third, his approach suggests that sociologists are doctors who have to engage in “diagnosis,” “clinical” examination and the treatment of “epidemiological problems.” This involves an assumption

about pathology which is not easy to make about society. Who defines what a pathological condition is? Fourth, even if the assumption about pathology is not made, his approach suggests that the change is to be introduced from the outside: “those vulnerable regions of the social structure through which we may be able to break through the impasse and effect the stipulated course of change” (1965: viii). This is, at best, social engineering. It leaves open the questions about “whose vision” and “whose desired course of change.” Fifth, his entire nomenclature suggests as if the task is to identify “vulnerable” or “soft” targets. If we are looking for change agents, then, indeed, we are looking for not vulnerability, but strength, to be expected from those who can lead forward.

It is not surprising that an entire study of refugees that is presented as “an illustrative diagnosis of soft spots” throws up very little by way of even practical measures. His recommendations for the four segments of refugees cannot be considered profound, nor indeed serve as a model for a collective sociological enterprise.

Mukherjee dedicates *The Sociologist and the Social Change in India Today* (1965) to, in his words, “my teacher, Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis, who taught me the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of scientific investigation.” He talks elsewhere of the profound influence exercised by Mahalanobis on him. He tells Partha N Mukherji and Chandan Sengupta that, “Whatever I learned later it was from Mahalanobis. Things like logic, the concept of causality, the difference between association and causality, correlation does not denote causality, that there is a difference between a behavioural variable and a perceptual variable, that the perceptual variable is not just an opinion, and so forth” (2000: 241). Later, he tells Anjan Ghosh that he learnt from Mahalanobis to understand “mathematics as philosophy,” so that “I can think statistically enough to cast a research in statistical frame” (Mukherjee 2014: 139).

Could it be that for Mukherjee statistics did not remain a key technology, but became philosophy and took him towards

a course of empirical research where the statistical frame became more important than the sociological frame, throwing up more and more statistical data as an end in itself? Further, could it be that in moving from Marx to Mahalanobis he paid a heavy price? His shift from the concept of “production relations,” which strongly characterised his early studies, to his later search for “soft spots” was not rewarding. Finally, could it be that he escaped from problems and paradoxes of inductive social science, for which Pradip Bose (1997) criticises him, only later in *The Measure of Time in the Appraisal of Social Reality*?

NOTE

- 1 Personal communication with Sabyasachi Bhattacharya in 2016.

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