

# COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA (MARXIST)

WEST BENGAL STATE COMMITTEE

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## FEATURES

### **Ashok Mitra: Moments and Memories**

IT was a memorial meeting with a difference. In fact, it was a celebration of the extra-ordinary rich life of a multi-faceted personality, Leftist thinker, and finance minister in the Left Front government of West Bengal, columnist, author, academician, planner, and bureaucrat – all rolled into one. The meeting took place at the Constitution Club, New Delhi on May 26. In fact Mr Mitra's oft quoted comments: I am not a "Bhadralok" - I am a communist, resounded again and again for a person who was actually both, off-course he kept his Left credential and desire to call a spade a spade till the end. The jam packed hall was indeed a miniature of his wide amalgam of supporters, social scientists, economists, friends, kisansabha activists, students and trade unionists. The organisers were Social Scientist, Sahmat, Anveshan and believers of Indo-Pakistan harmony and friendship. True to his desire, the meeting had an agenda based on his will that there should be an abundance of 'RabindraSangeet' that he loved best besides off course some speeches. Out of his list of sixty he wanted to be rendered six songs were sung by JayatiGhosh, one of the best proponents of RabindraSangeet with the memorable recitation

"Jakhonrabonaamimartyokayay" (When I am no more).

Professor PrabhatPatnaik referred to him as exceptionally brilliant, ideologically very firm, but full of grace, charm and courtesy even with some opponents. He also referred to him as being almost religiously honest, somewhat of a romantic communist but with an optimal combination of head and heart. The heart he said pushed him towards romantic adventurism, while his head held in back. He added his optimism kept him going. Prabhat noted that his last piece for Social Scientist was an obituary on Kitty Menon – a dear friend. He recalled his contribution to the left movement, his helping to break the agrarian impasse in Bengal and his introduction of the panchayat system in West Bengal. He also touched upon the 'operation Barga' and attempts to give land to the tiller based on the dictum: he who cultivates must reap the benefits. He also recalled his important contribution to center-state economic relations. It is in the realm of ideas that one would miss Ashok Mitra's contribution to the cause of the Left.

Dr. JayatoGhosh said that despite his strong views he was always ready to talk with all kinds of people for right causes. She referred to his absence of sectarianism. She also touched on his long life and his attempt to bring out a new

journal – something different 'ArekRakam' to try to revive intellectual thinking in Bengal. His attempts to fight GST in the court of law was perhaps his last wish which could not be fulfilled, all this when he was in his late eighties. She recalled his inability to ever give up.

Comrade NilotpalsBasu fondly remembered how comradely he was and when once he asked him whether he could converse in Hindi, he said that he spent all his time in mastering two languages Bangla and English and wished could learn a couple of more at least! I think there are very few people who have such wonderful mastery over two languages. His "Calcutta diary" in EPW was so widely read and appreciated. So was his 'Apalachapala' in Bangla.

KisanSabha leader Comrade HannanMollah was remembering the days when they used to visit different villages together. Once, in one of the meetings, the organisers kept on insisting that he has to have some rasgulla, though he was not fond of sweets at all, Mitra just squeezed four of the syrupy balls and put them in his pocket!!

ArdhenduSen who chaired the programme emphasized on the fact that how humble a man he was! Mr. Sen met him first in one of the Governmentdabunglow as a sub-divisional officer when

Ashok Mitra was the Finance Minister of West Bengal and how this acquaintance flowered into a friendly relationship over the years.

A brief Sketch of Ashok Mitra's life was given by ParanjyGuhaThakurta with some memories shared by Tapan Bose, PranabSen, and a brief welcome by RityushaTiary on behalf of the organisers explaining the background of the "RabindraSangeet" rendered at the meeting.

Post Script: An elderly person amongst the crowd reminded me of how Ashok Da almost till his very death would ring up Professor LalitaChakarborty, wife of the famous economist SukhomoyChakarborty, to find out how she was keeping and how the others were doing often with some fond remembrances.

31st May, 2018

