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The Dynamics of Morals. By Radhakamal Mukerjee. London: Macmillan, n.d. [1950]. Pp. xxvii+530.

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In an age of specialization, Radhakamal Mukerjee was a man who knew everything. Not only had he read the multilingual literatures of his homeland but also an astonishing breadth of Western philosophy, history, economics, psychology, and even popular culture. He wrote 50 books in a long academic life, rising at 3:00 a.m. for yoga and meditation, and then spending part of every morning at dictation and writing. (Mukerjee once told a student, "Write ten pages a day and you will have fulfillment.") And his writings range as widely as his reading: everything from rural studies to class analysis, personality theory to regional ecology, population problems to mysticism and Indian arts. Even the books' genres are diverse: from creative summaries of existing work to empirical analysis to pure theory.

The seemingly impossible choice of which of Mukerjee's books to read is eased by a family resemblance among them. For Mukerjee did not himself distinguish clearly between topics. Religious texts might bear on the interpretation of village life, and biological and geomorphic themes might pervade a discussion of the Bengali upper classes. (For example, Mukerjee thought that the ever-changing Ganges/Brahmaputra river channels had interacted with the differential social regimes of Muslims and Hindus to determine much of the politics of religion in Bengal.)

This family resemblance was to a large extent a conscious choice. For the central strain of Mukerjee's work is toward what he called "the universal." This was not an abstract argument governing a set of particular instances, as in Western thinking. Rather it was a commodious process of aggregation and adaptation by which different kinds of knowledge, different kinds of political concern, and indeed different kinds of readers might come together in some harmonious process of mutual influence. So biology, geography, class interest, history, morals, and spiritualism were all of a piece for Mukerjee.

The choice of a particular work is thus less consequential than it might be. Our choice here falls on *Dynamics of Morals*, because the book illustrates very clearly the pervasion of Mukerjee's sociological thinking by mysticism and religion. But of course, since 2020 Mukerjee has been better known for his early works on ecology and institutions.

It is useful to say a few words about those more familiar works. A good example is Mukerjee's *Regional Sociology* (1926), the first recognizably modern text on that subject. The book combined a broad-ranging reading of Friedrich Ratzel, Frederic Le Play, and Edmond Demolins with a detailed application of ecological thinking to India (and Asia more broadly) from the Indian point of view. Mukerjee's processual and cultural approach softened

* Another review from 2052 to share with *AJS* readers.—*Ed.*

the geographical and climatic determinism of his predecessors. To be sure, later, metropolitan versions of human ecology ignored him, in part because he retained enough of the early 20th-century scientific vernacular about race to be unacceptable to the political generations of the turn of the 21st century. But since 2020, his focus on holistic analysis of social life—ranging from the biological to the cultural—has reinstated him as a major forerunner of a truly environmental sociology.

Yet Mukerjee the environmentalist was only one of many Mukerjees. *Dynamics* better illustrates the thread of Hindu thinking that binds together the diversity of his reading and reflection.

Radhakamal Mukerjee was born in 1889 in West Bengal. His father was a Kulin Brahman who grew up in poverty but made himself an eminent barrister and married the daughter of a wealthy Calcutta family. Although he died when Radhakamal was five, the family flourished nonetheless. As the youngest of many children, Radhakamal was his mother's darling. (Much of Mukerjee's character, discipline, and writing style is captured in his remark, in his posthumously published autobiographical fragments, that "the recall of my mother's piety, penance, and purity saved me from many temptations, allurements, and excitements of life"; *India: The Dawn of a New Era—an Autobiography* [New Delhi: Radha Publications, 1997], p. 27). He excelled in school, although he mainly remembered the brutality and occasional futility of his teachers.

In 1905, when Mukerjee was about to go to college, came the thunderbolt of Lord Curzon's partition of Bengal. Eventually rescinded in 1911, this policy radicalized the (Hindu) Bengali elite that stood to lose professional opportunities, landholder privileges, and political power by the creation of a majority Muslim East Bengal. Like his brother, Mukerjee threw himself into the massive Bengali reaction and made his first real contacts with the general population. But the cautious family allowed only one brother the patriotic gesture of leaving the imperial school system for the Bengali-sponsored national schools. So Mukerjee enrolled at the celebrated Calcutta Presidency College, where he graduated with double first-class degrees, in history and English. His classmates included many who would become India's pre- and post-Independence elite, and his teachers and acquaintances included men like the physicist Jagadish Chandra Bose and the poet Rabindranath Tagore—the latter of whom would suggest the title for Mukerjee's *Regional Sociology*.

Mukerjee had already finished a draft of his first book (*Foundations of Indian Economics* 1916) when he graduated in 1910 and became a teacher of economics at Krishnath College in his hometown of Berhampore. Actively religious since boyhood, he deepened his practice of yoga and meditation at this time, but he also began working in the cooperative movement and running night schools for adult education. At the same time he edited a prominent Bengali journal (*Upasana*), joining the intellectual elite that was creating a new Indian nationalism on Hindu foundations. In 1914, Mukerjee met Patrick Geddes, the Scottish city planner/sociologist/prophet

who was seeking in India new worlds to transform and who would himself become the first professor of sociology at the University of Bombay in 1917. From Geddes, Mukerjee learned a broad and ecological vision of social life, which complemented the economics he had studied in college and the biocology he had absorbed from the Principal of Krishnath (E. M. Wheeler). To all this he would add a focus on culture and values that Geddes lacked.

In 1915, Mukerjee's night schools were suppressed by the British on grounds of possible sedition, but Mukerjee escaped jail through a teaching appointment at Lahore that eventually turned into a lectureship at the University of the Punjab. He then lectured briefly at Calcutta before receiving his Ph.D. in 1920 and taking a position at Lucknow as professor of economics and sociology. He remained at Lucknow for his entire career, living in a bungalow on campus. He was Vice-Chancellor in 1955–57. Mukerjee died in 1968, orphic and ambivalent about the student radicals of that time.

Like most academics, Mukerjee did not live a life of events, but of everyday practices of teaching and knowing. Not surprisingly, his autobiographical fragments reveal few details, but some general facts are evident. He was widely known (and published) in the West, and his 1937 tour of Western universities saw him at Oxford, Cambridge, and London, as well as Columbia, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Chicago. He even found time to visit Russia on this trip, visiting cooperative farms and factories, and remarking somewhat cryptically that "for me, a foreigner, there seemed to be little excitement about [the show trials] in Moscow" (*India*, p. 171.) A 1948 trip would take him to Harvard and Montreal.

At some point, he married and had children, but his wife figures in his autobiographical fragments only when he recounts the misery he felt when she had an incurable illness. To be sure, the Eternal Feminine—and its Indian version as Shakti the Mother Goddess—commands an entire chapter of his autobiography. But other than his mother, the women in Mukerjee's life (a wife and two daughters) are invisible. He thought sex itself something to be "curbed and assuaged," transformed into the universal Shakti Divine.

Mukerjee trained dozens of students, many of whom went into the Indian planning bureaucracies. Some of his students were his followers not only intellectually but also spiritually. That he was for them a guru and a saint is clear from their annual birthday memorials and assiduous publishing of his remaining manuscripts, but even more from their extravagant memorial essays, some of which are appended to his autobiography.

Reading *Dynamics* reminds us that sociology can be embodied in many kinds of texts. In this series we have encountered several of the common forms: ethnographies (Kenyatta, Srinivas, Hellmann, Fei, Chen); histories both macro and meso (Freyre, Ghurye, Qu, Noer); historical epics (Sarmiento, da Cunha), and overviews (Fukutake, Ramabai, Fanon). We have seen some pure theory (Shari'ati, Gökalp) and even fiction (Bâ). But *Dynamics* is a new kind of text: a meditation. In this it resembles works by Ludwig Wittgenstein, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Søren Kierkegaard—writers who made short, coherent arguments but seldom connected them into larger architectonic wholes. It is more a philosophical than a sociological genre, but one

that suits Mukerjee's project of creating a kind of universal knowledge not by educative or inductive systems, but rather by encountering and reconciling vast territories of knowledge.

As befits such a project of encounter, the book was not written, but dictated. Dictation is evident in the long sentences, the abundant repetitions, the myriad triads of terms. The prose is often incantatory:

Conscience is as much sustained by laws, folkways and institutions as the latter are nourished by conscience. The ideal values and the entire framework of social relations and institutions, laws, moralities and manners are inseparable and continuous. It is in the invisible world of meanings and values that conscience, honour, law, morals and folkways mingle and mutually judge and interpenetrate one another, safeguarding both the full and complete expression of the human personality and rightness of social relations, freedoms and laws. (*Dynamics*, p. 257)

Mukerjee's arguments do not flow with logical rigor from defined terms to grounded assertions. They swirl and overlap. Meaning emerges gradually and indirectly. Chapter subheadings float relatively free of the text they precede, being either starting points for meditations or—more likely—retrospective attempts to order a meditative oral text.

All this means that reading the work as a linear text is foolish. One must encounter it a chapter at a time. One must pause to reflect, disagree, wonder. The hasty reader searching for "Mukerjee's core argument" will find little or nothing. Indeed, one of Mukerjee's basic themes is the multiplicity and processuality of knowledge. This theme is echoed in his theory of the self, which reverses the argument of Georg Simmel that more and more social involvements make individuals more and more uniquely individualized. For Mukerjee, increasing numbers of social involvements free the individual from his particularity. Freedom from habit and routine allow one to enjoy the unusualness of all things and their reconciliation in the absolute. The universal is not what comes by abstracting away from content, but what comes by experiencing that content in many ways and many forms.

At the outset, the book seems strongly influenced by psychoanalysis (Freud's superego concept is central) and by the Gestalt psychologists (whose "field" concept is equally central). But with these, as with the hundreds of other authors quoted, Mukerjee is simply using a then-current vocabulary to say things he feels to be permanent truths. Freudian and Gestalt psychology are moreover only two of Mukerjee's Western interlocutors. There are cameo appearances by the pragmatists (John Dewey most of all), the evolutionist/processualists (Julian Huxley, C. H. Waddington, A. N. Whitehead), the mainstream psychologists (Gordon Allport, Jean Piaget) as well as classical writers from Plato to Marx and Nietzsche. The index contains hundreds of names, and, as often as not, one finds on the indexed pages an apposite quote. Indeed, the multiplicity of references and examples gives the book a vertiginous quality. On page 266 the text concerns the character of the International Labour Organization. Ten pages later we are deep in the Bhagavad Gita.

The book has 19 chapters, whose titles ring the changes on the words morals, conscience, ethics, virtue, and value. Hence we have "Conscience and Culture," or "Evolution and Ethics," or "Morals beyond Society." The internal headings add to these a vocabulary of units and embodiments: crowd, culture, individual, laws, myth, norms, personality, self, and symbols. The argument gradually and circuitously brings into focus the relations between all these things, as theorized by Mukerjee. Indeed, the later chapters restate and in some cases reinterpret Mukerjee's earlier works in the light of the moral arguments made here.

Yet even these vocabularies omit some of the core concepts of the book, in particular the four types of groups (crowd, interest-group, society/community, and commonalty) and the attributes that are associated with each of them: values, means of evocation, functions, moral imperatives, and means of control. Thus, for interest groups, in Mukerjee's theory, the value is goals. The means of evocation is education; the moral imperative is reciprocity and fair play; and the means of control is physical and social coercion. As this list suggests (and as Mukerjee says explicitly), Western social theory is largely concerned with (Mukerjee would have said "bogged down in") the theory of interest groups.

For society/community, the value is ideals, the means of evocation is art, the moral imperative is justice/equity, and the means of control is shame/social honor. Mukerjee imagined shame in a broad sense, meaning the shame of violating social ideals rather than the pecking-order shame of what are usually called "honor societies" by the Western social scientists who disapprove of them. Mukerjee thought the concerns of society/community to be central in Asian societies and thought their focus on shame to arise from this concern.

Finally, for Mukerjee's true ideal—the commonalty—the value is norms, the means of evocation is religion, the moral imperative is love/sympathy, and the means of control is self-conscious conscience. Much of the book discusses the nature of self-conscious conscience, a fact that explains Mukerjee's interest in psychoanalytic therapy with its project of creating a mature conscience to replace the "tyrannical superego."

Curiously, the crowd—the first and for Mukerjee the lowest type of group—has no such properties: no value, no means of evocation, no moral imperative, no means of control. It is mere sociality. Given Mukerjee's neo-Hindu pedigree, one cannot help recalling that of the four Brahmanical *varnas*, only the upper three are "twice-born." The four types of social groups thus seem an echo of the four *varnas*. But Mukerjee to a great extent avoids reification of his categories. In much of the text, neither particular social groups nor particular epochs and times are seen to be "commonalty" or "interest-groups"; rather these may all be aspects of one group or of one individual's experience. They may come and go in the ceaseless changing of society over time.

For Mukerjee is militantly processualist: "Groups are episodes in man's adjustment to the environment that is both physical and social-cultural"

(*Dynamics*, p. 74). “Like every other tool of the human hand and mind Ethics constantly changes and evolves” (p. 77). “Morality thus becomes a phase of the social configuration, an episode in the social process in which are converged all the evolutionary forces of life, mind, and spirit. All values are essentially social values in which man shares his experience with fellowmen” (p. 127). But most important, Mukerjee does not expect an end of differences, as we see in the following long passage:

Such values are those of goodness, justice, love or solidarity that lend the final meaning to any action and relationship in society. Their imperatives are universal for all men, but their contents vary from man to man, and from social situation to social situation. These are normative ideals or norms into which man focuses both the consummation of his concrete specific values of the moment and the bafflement of his long-cherished dreams and aspirations. These arise often from stresses and conflicts that his social self must experience as it cannot reconcile the ideals, loyalties and virtues of the different groups among which it is distributed. (Pp. 131–32)

But at the same time, he thought the actual present (1950) so full of change that he doubted the possibility of the universal.

Perhaps the question in morals as to what are the universal moral values and standards is less significant than the fact that the current moral values clash and are undergoing momentous transformation. Theories of morals based on first principles or basic norms or on the methods of dialectical analysis are less valuable than those based on factual relations and valuations in the group situation, which, as the moral situation, can be approached empirically through the investigation of change, substitution or new integration of moral standards. (P. 199)

But in the end, Mukerjee expects the triumph of commonalty, both as a personal discipline in individual lives and in the evolving complexity of society. In part, this expectation is rooted in his obvious engagement in the social and religious practices of Hindu culture in general and yoga in particular. But it is also rooted in his early contact with evolutionary thinkers like Geddes and Ratzel and his continuing reading of Western writers who had similar visions: forgotten scholars like Nikolai Berdyaev and Max Scheler, whose strong religious commitments have elided them from the Western theoretical mainstream. Mukerjee refers to these two from time to time, along with other spiritualists like the Henri Bergson of *The Two Sources for Morality and Religion*.

Yet Mukerjee’s analysis is complicated by a drift between empirical and moral judgment. The reader can have no doubt that Mukerjee himself believes on purely moral grounds that commonalty and its virtues of love and sympathy are the highest form of life and that crowd behavior is bad behavior. But the reader also can have no doubt that Mukerjee’s analysis of crowds and interest groups—both here and elsewhere—is strongly empirical, as is his analysis of the moral impact of Western invasion on the society/community of India and other subordinated nations, and of the pre-

curiousness of commonalty in the face of certain social changes. Indeed, one cannot tell whether he speaks as an empirical scientist or a moralist when he gives the apophthegm "[Man] is thus the evaluating animal" (p. 89). Indeed, Mukerjee can on occasion seem decades ahead of his time about such matters:

The endeavor during the last few decades to make sociology "value-free" has over-shot its mark. In the anxiety lest his personal valuation distort social reality, the sociologist leaves human values out of account, unexplored and unanalyzed. The consequence is that certain established values are often tacitly accepted though concealed in the methods of analysis of social relations and institutions. Indifference or neutrality in the matter of valuations stands for traditionalism or opportunism." (P. 121)

In this discussion, I have but scratched the surface of Mukerjee's work. He engaged the sociology and philosophy of morals and values in a way that is profound as well as unusual. There are to be sure questions and challenges. Marxists have long argued that Mukerjee's type of moral theory, along with the religions that elaborated it, permitted millenia of domination of the Asian masses by various overlords. One wonders how Mukerjee might have responded to such an argument. Perhaps he gave that response somewhere in his immense corpus. Or perhaps he might tell us that we will know what he thinks when we can imagine it for ourselves. Certainly he makes a persuasive case in this book for taking morals seriously on their own terms, rather than on Durkheim's terms as simple social facts requiring explanation. For that reason alone, the book should be carefully read.

Mukerjee brings us to the end of another year of reading, which has taken us from Ellen Hellmann's Johannesburg to Euclides da Cunha's Canudos; from the Chinese villages of Fei Xiaotong to the Japanese villages of Fukutake Tadashi; from the modernist Islam of Deliar Noer's Indonesia to the neo-Hinduism of Radhakamal Mukerjee's Bengal. Those pairings themselves already suggest interpretative linkages. The first pairing speaks of doom: Hellman's Africans will face 50 years of militant oppression while da Cunha's *sertanejos* are exterminated before our eyes. The second pairing speaks of rural villages, the world of landlords and rice paddies and local organization, but their futures are different: in the short term, the Chinese villages face revolution and transformation, while the Japanese villages will disappear in the consumer culture that will come to the Chinese only much later. The third pairing speaks of religion, of Islam and Hinduism. Unlike Western social scientists, both writers are profoundly committed to and active practitioners of religions that are not limited to the civil or "private" world as then-contemporary Christianity was in the liberal West. This makes them important counterweights to Western theorizing.

All six books have their roots in the contact between cultures. This contact can be imperial, as in Noer, Hellmann, and Mukerjee, or economic, as

in Fei, Fukutake, and Hellmann, or religious, as in Noer, Mukerjee, and da Cunha. In all six it is profoundly political. Yet these writers were not activists. Only Noer took major political stands, and he had exile to show for it. Fei, Hellman, and Mukerjee were all active reformers, to be sure, but only Fei worked in a country where reformism could and did lead to (internal) exile.

Unlike last year's writers, these six were not inveterate travelers. Fei and Noer received academic degrees abroad to be sure, and Fukutake, Mukerjee, and Fei took occasional academic trips. But for the most part these were homebound scholars, widely read in world culture, but dedicated to their own countries. A more striking common factor is that Fei, Fukutake, Noer, and Mukerjee were all profoundly affected by the Second World War. The Japanese invasion fatally weakened the nationalist government of China and liberated the Indonesians from Dutch imperialism, before it quickly succumbed itself to an American power that insisted on reorganizing Japanese society in important ways. In India, the war-bankrupt British could not afford to remain and cut the Gordian knot of religious difference (which historians claim they had themselves created) by a hasty partition that left hundreds of thousands dead and 10 million homeless. In each case, the scholar's work reflects the war both in its objects of study and in its conception of the role of the social thinker.

But the most important issue raised by this year's readings is the nature of unitary societies. Fei, Noer, and Mukerjee all argue, one way or another, in favor of societies characterized by a fundamental unity: Communist, Muslim, Hindu. All believe their proposed societies to be characterized not only by a cohesive and meaningful set of values, but also by toleration of difference. There is much to admire in these visions, for they are founded in aspirations and ideals common to most humanity: a fulfilling and meaningful life, social difference tempered by cohesion, common welfare and assistance, mutual support. And all avoid to some extent the vacuous materialism that seems to be the fate of liberal societies where ultimate concerns have been banished to the private, personal realm.

But this toleration of difference may be illusory. As we have seen, one way of reading Fei's life is as a progression toward enlightenment. But another is as a slow recovery from forced recantation. On one reading, Noer's proposed Muslim state is evenly tolerant of Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and even secularism. On another, it would be a basis for religious homogenization and enforcement. In some views, Mukerjee's commonality is an exciting, because alternative, form of universalism. In others, it is a neo-Hindu orthodoxy from an author whose nationalism reflected opposition to the liberation of East Bengal's Muslims from Hindu domination. For all three, then, the unitary societies can be read either as fulfilling and supportive or as constraining and oppressive.

As for liberalism, in neither da Cunha nor Hellmann does it make a strong appearance. Da Cunha's Brazilian Republic is an embarrassing mass of corruption and irrationality. Hellmann's tiny liberal group is im-

potent against overpowering forces, and its own proposed policies were to be remodeled and then married to racism to produce the bizarre offspring that was apartheid. Only Fukutake seems optimistic, and the reader knows that as of his writing his country was only 15 years past an apocalyptic involvement with fascism and, moreover, that his proposed liberated villages would soon be gutted by the triumphant forces of state-managed consumer capitalism.

Social life is indeed a process, a process of difference. We need the difference. But not the tragedy.