

# Lament for Economics: Old and New

D P Mukerji

I HAVE just retired from academic life after thirty eight years of experience as a teacher of economics and sociology in two Universities. These long years have inured me with some knowledge of these two social sciences. Our syllabuses in economics have also changed in the meantime. In our younger days we were used to Sidgwick, Marshall, Taussig, Bastable and the like, but we depended mostly on Marshall with Adam Smith as a side-show. This, along with a few decorations, went right up to 1935 when we met with the big crisis of our life, the Great Depression of the thirties. We, of course, were familiar with the 'Treatise' of Keynes, but his 'General Theory' based on the theory of Depression, bowled us over completely. Lionel Robbins appeared, but except on his pupils of the London School of Economics he made little impression beyond his clear and logical English. Robertson, Hayek and Hawtrey caused a few ripples. The Swedish economists also occasioned a little stir, and though they anticipated Keynes's 'General Theory' to a large extent, the influence of Keynes on all of us was, so to say, overwhelming, after about a decade.

Since then the world has been divided into Keynesian and post-Keynesian schools. We in India are Keynesian by and large. Some of us read post-Keynesian literature no doubt, but it does not leave a marked dent; we rather feel that Keynesianism does not fit in with the economics of an under-developed economy, and post-Keynesian literature has remained purely theoretical. That is understandable, because the culture-lag in India is marked. We took nearly fifteen years to be Keynesians and we have not yet grown to outgrow Keynes. But India is moving fast. Thanks to our new economists of the last four or five years, they are shaping themselves to be the disciples of Leontief and Tinbergen. Economic statistics, in spite of Leontief, is still a long way off, unless it be the work of Professor Mahalanobis who is not an economist by training; and mathematical economics is very far from our streets. This, in short, is the Indian state of affairs in Economics. By and large, we are Keynesians.

Unfortunately, however, we have ignored the important divide in Keynesianism. Surreptitiously, we may say that Keynesianism is divided into two post-Keynesian areas, the para-mathematical, which is fashionable in most quarters, and the para-Marxist, of which Mrs Robinson is the English counterpart, which is not popular. We can, of course, understand this: Keynes laid the quietus on Marxism by certain disparaging remarks on Marx, among which the reference to 'the underworld' of economics was the most important. It was a la Bloomsbury, and it has stuck. On the other hand, Schumpeter, another economist of the Keynesian order of repute, says about Marx: "Most of the creations of the intellect or fancy pass away for good after a time that varies between an after-dinner hour and a generation. Some, however, do not. They suffer eclipses, but they come back again, and they come back not as unrecognizable elements of a cultural inheritance, but in their individual garb and with their personal scars which people may see and touch. These we may call the great ones -and it is not a disadvantage of this definition that it links greatness to vitality. Taken in this sense, this is undoubtedly the world to apply to the message or Marx. ..."

Schumpeter was very critical of Marx, yet he took him as one of the great ones of the earth. But barring only one man from Aligarh University, Schumpeter has been completely ignored in India. His references to Marx are not read here at all. Keynes was an eminently successful economist also, creating a hundred to a dozen and including a few Indian economists. This too we understand: Schumpeter was a German-American with not much of propaganda-value to his credit. Thus it is that along with Keynes, Indian economists have been totally indifferent to Marx and Marxism.

They have also accepted more or less Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's opinion that Marx is back-dating, a century-old fad in a way. Not that Pandit Nehru knows his Karl Marx, or Keynes for that matter, but he has a snob-value for the

Indian intellectuals. The total Indian situation is thus interesting: Indian intellectuals, along with Nehru, are Socialists or Socialistic without any trade, truck or traffic with Marx and Marxism and tend to become Keynesians, if they have heard about Keynes at all. If is not known to Nehru and Indian Intellectuals that Marxism is intimately connected with modern technology and Keynesianism only in a very negative way.

To put it in a slightly different manner: our best men of the earlier generation have dismissed Marx as belonging to the 'underworld' of economics and not accepted him as one of the great ones of the world. There is a difference of principle in the two attitudes, but in practice there is none. Our brilliant economists of the present generation are mostly busy with spinning cocoons of model-building, with formulating static or comparative static models of a notional system that is neither here nor there, or with description of things as they were a few years ago. All this does not of course exhaust their repertoire; their researches are legion. But the capital fact is this: they do not come near Marxism by a long chalk. Certainly, economics is coming up fast, but is it coming up to the position of a possible rapprochement between Marx and Keynes? It may be argued that when all Indian economists have dismissed Marx, there is nothing to be said for it. Unfortunately, however, all the economists of a thousand million people think otherwise and have adopted Marxism. There may be something in it, and modern Indian economists may just as well discuss it. If Marx and Keynes can thus be brought together, the simplicity of Indian endeavours will be changed. If they cannot be, if Marx and Keynes cannot be squared up in essentials, if they live apart, then we have to make a choice between them. Indian economists, we know, are Keynesians, but we need not be non-Marxists by choice. That is not a good thing. Non-Marxism is a wide field; there is certainly plenty of freedom; but in actuality, it is indifference. By and large, our brilliant young Indian economists are becoming indifferent economists.

I, for one, would want to make a choice. That choice, though wide, versatile and comprehensive, is a well-marked one. It has been simple, and for nearly twenty five years or more. And I have suffered in the sense that I am called a non-economist, that is, a sociologist, because I am a Marxist (preferably, Marxologist). That choice is that Economics is just a human science. It is not economic science distinct from politics, sociology, psychology and history. It is one social science distinguishable from natural science. It is not a 'synthetic' product, nor is it merely an inter-related corpus of sciences. If it is one human science, there should be a unit of study. That unit should be a concrete object, but only a humanly concrete subject. What can be more humanly concrete than production, that is, a dynamic human production at that? Any concrete production will not do. Therefore, production belongs to a different, a higher order of facts. Thus economics as a subject of scientific study belongs to the human ordering of facts higher than that of any concrete object of primary goods. It thus comes under human science, or a social science. We will begin with that. We will then branch off to politics, sociology, history, etc. That will not mean that politics, etc, will be different kettles of fish. It will not thus be argued that decisions will belong to politics — that is party-machinery, and that economic analysis will be determined by economists merely. We do not want to see that party-decisions are made by all, after indefinite, indeterminate, ineffective, and non-final, periods of discussion. We do not want to differentiate between discussion and decision. We want them to take recourse to a continuous process. It is stupid to dis-engage ourselves from political decisions, because we are citizens en bloc, human beings in fact.

This method, the only human method, is certainly dangerous. It is dangerous because of the vested interests of economics, sociology, politics, history, etc, as independent entities. Each of these topics has become compartmentalised. Science has proliferated; and each has become a 'subject', many 'subjects' of study, each with a cadre of scientists of its own. The result is bewildering. C P Snow

has said that there are two independent disciplines, science and humanities, and they are strangers. In reality, there are many disciplines, each one completely closed to the other. Even in Economics there are a dozen 'subjects' knowledge of each of which is barred to every other. Part of it is understandable again, and it will be unwise on our part to ignore it. 80 the best thing to do is to take Economics as an interim object of study with two sets of workmanship, one for that of human affairs as Economists, and another as

economic engineers or back-room boys. Economists as such will thus be political economists to begin with. That means Economics tends towards Marxism, because Marxism does not separate Economics from Politics (Sociology, History, etc). Otherwise our brilliant men will become merely de-humanised scholars. Marxism is a whole human science. In that sense Nehru is wrong when he condemns Marxism as back-datish. To re-collect the umpteen human or social disciplines into a human science is a worthy human effort.