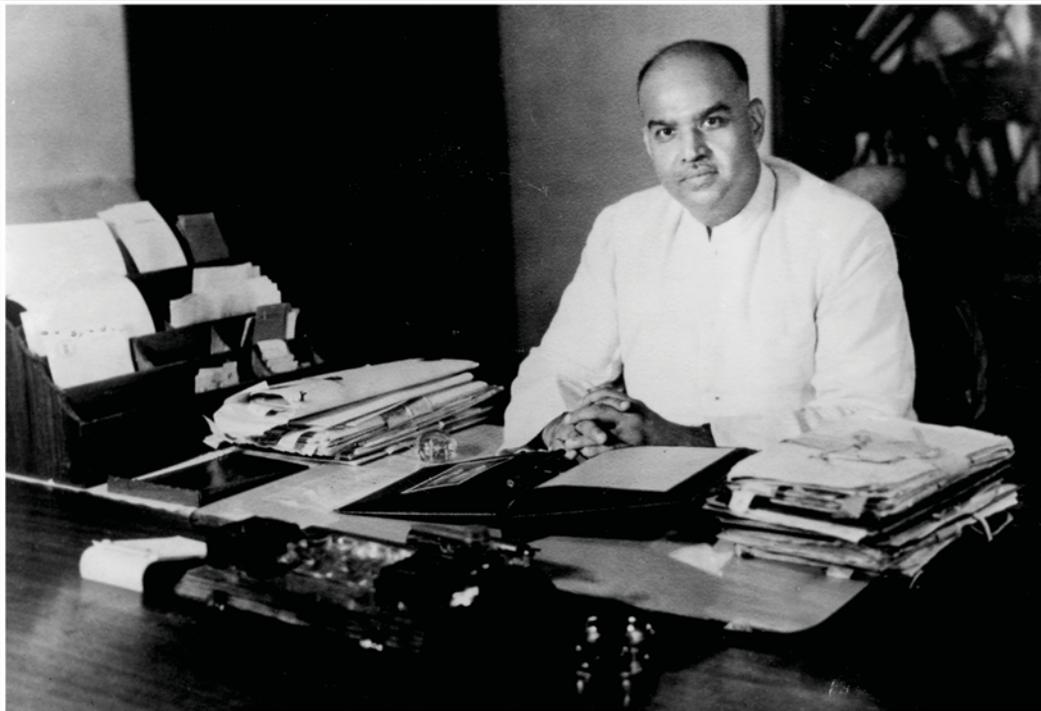


# DR. SYAMA PRASAD MOOKERJEE

*A Selfless Patriot*



Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee :  
A Selfless Patriot

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**Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee Research Foundation**

## Foreword

In a brief life span of 52 years, Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee (1901-1953) statesman, educationist, minister and founder of an alternate political narrative and stream in India, strode many worlds. His life is a fascinating example of how much one can achieve, driven by an unalloyed determination to serve the cause of India – especially her progress, her unity and her well-being.

In his address on the occasion of inaugurating an exhibition on Dr. Mookerjee's life and contributions in Nehru Memorial Museum & Library in New Delhi on June 29<sup>th</sup> 2016, BJP national President Shri Amit Shah observed that Dr. Mookerjee had made three epochal interventions in the history of modern India that ultimately altered the trajectory of the flow of national events for good.

The first was his intervention which ruptured Jinnah's plan of greater Pakistan and the retaining of Calcutta and West Bengal in India as a place where the Bengali Hindus could live and also find refuge after being pushed out of East Pakistan, the second was the formation of Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) as a nationalist alternative to the faction ridden and Nehru beholden Congress, which in the early days after independence, especially after the demise of Sardar Patel, had already begun degenerating into a one-man driven sycophantic conglomerate and the third was Dr. Mookerjee's intervention in Kashmir which eventually ensured that the state remained an integral part of the Indian union.

The question thus, that comes to mind is, had Dr. Mookerjee not been there, or had he not existed what would

have happened to India? The first of course is self-evident, the entire Bengal and Punjab would have gone to Pakistan. Over the years, Jihad would have a larger area from which to breed and spread poison. The Bengali Hindus would have, without a home state, migrated to various parts of the country as a dispossessed and displaced people clinging to memories of a homeland and an identity.

Dr. Mookerjee's second intervention was when he created BJS. Realising early the unilateralism of Congress and the dictatorial tendencies of its leadership in the absence of a viable alternative, Dr. Mookerjee launched this alternate political narrative. "The mistaken policies and '*Abharatiya*' and unrealistic approach to the national problems by the party in power", argued the first manifesto of the BJS, "is primarily responsible for this state of affairs in the country. In their anxiety to make Bharat a carbon-copy of the West, they have ignored and neglected the best in Bharatiya life and ideals. They have failed to harness the enthusiasm created by freedom to the task of realisation of the great potentialities of the country." Had Dr. Mookerjee not created BJS, Congress unilateralism would have dominated; it would have pushed India into a one-party or a one family rule and lead to a chaotic situation with an increase in fissiparous tendencies. Had Dr. Mookerjee not initiated this move, Indian democracy would have been poorer, with less or little options, with voices facing a stifling embargo put by a spirit of political intolerance.

Dr. Mookerjee's last intervention was in the affairs of Jammu & Kashmir which, he argued, had to be more completely integrated with India in order to ensure India's well-being and her security and integrity. The sovereignty of the Indian Parliament and the Indian Constitution, Dr. Mookerjee felt, was to be paramount and the benefit of the Constitution had to reach all citizens. Had Dr. Mookerjee not made this final – and for him fatal because he never emerged out it alive – intervention, the entire state of Jammu & Kashmir would have perhaps gone into

the control of those forces who wish to see India fragmented. It would have become the cockpit of terror.

Had Dr. Mookerjee not existed, India would have been afflicted with all of these and much more. BJP President Shri Amit Shah's observations has set the framework for making future assessment's of Dr. Mookerjee's contribution in preserving and protecting India's integrity and freedom.

This booklet gives a very brief overview of Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee's life – a saga which has been only partially narrated and often suppressed or distorted.

**Dr. Anirban Ganguly**  
**Director**  
**SPMRF**



## **DR. SYAMA PRASAD MOOKERJEE**

### ***A Selfless Patriot***

It is not very often that we come across a person who lived only 52 years and was in politics only for 14 years and in that short period rose to great heights and made history. Yet such a person was Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee who was born on 6<sup>th</sup> July, 1901 in Calcutta (now Kolkata) and breathed his last on 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 1953 in captivity at Srinagar under mysterious circumstances. In the life span and manner of exit there is an uncanny resemblance between him and his dearest disciple Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya.

The second son of the great educationist Sir Asutosh Mookerjee (1864-1924), known as *Banglar Bagh* "Tiger of Bengal", Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee began his life also as an educationist and a lawyer. In fact, Sir Asutosh Mookerjee, who had multifarious talents as a Lawyer, mathematician and educationist, had groomed his eldest son Rama Prasad for the legal profession and second son Syama Prasad for the field of education. After a brilliant career in the Calcutta University and having topped in graduation and post-graduation, Syama Prasad studied Law to become a member of the "Indian Bar" in the Calcutta High Court and thereafter set sail for England to become a Barrister and enter the "English Bar". But Syama Prasad's principal intention of going to England was to study the working of the Universities in Britain. This he managed to do and he returned to India to become a member of the syndicate of Calcutta University. At the age of 23 he was the youngest Member of this Syndicate. At this time India was being run under the 'Dyarchy system' introduced by the Montagu-Chelmsford

Reforms of 1919 and Education was one of the 'Transferred Subjects', that is to say one in which Indians had some say. Accordingly, in 1929 Syama Prasad entered the Legislative Council from the University Constituency as a Congress candidate. However, immediately following this the Congress decided to boycott the Council. Syama Prasad disagreed with this and resigned his seat in the Council to come back as an independent candidate. At that phase of his life he was concerned purely with Education and not with politics.

At that young age Syama Prasad gave such a good account of himself in running the affairs of the University that the great Scientist, Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray once congratulated him as "*Baap Ka Beta*". He became a Vice Chancellor of the University at an unbelievably young age of 33 and infused new life into the running of the University. He served two terms of two years each as Vice Chancellor from 1934 to 1938. As Vice Chancellor of Calcutta University, Dr. Mookerjee supported nationalist scholars who wished to undertake serious research in Indian history from an Indian viewpoint; he encouraged excavations, opened the first museum of Indian history, culture and archaeology in the University and also invited international universities to send their students to study Indian civilisation, culture and Sanskrit. He promoted Bharatiya languages and in 1937 also invited Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore to deliver the Convocation Address in Bengali – this was the first time ever that a convocation address was delivered in Bengali in the precincts of the University of Calcutta.

Meanwhile personal tragedies struck Syama Prasad. His elder sister Kamala was widowed, remarried, again widowed, and died early. His father, Sir Asutosh, a guiding light in his life, died prematurely, only at the age of 60, in 1924. Then came, the worst tragedy, when his beloved wife of only eleven years, Sudha, died. Syama Prasad was left to take care of his four young children. He could remain in public life only because of the help he was given in this regards by his sister-in-law, Smt. Tara Devi, wife of his elder brother

Justice Rama Prasad.

In 1935, the British Parliament passed the Government of India Act whereby more representation for Indians was introduced and each Province was to have a Government elected and run entirely by Indians but under the executive Governorship of a British Governor and with a Civil Service manned by Indian and British Officers of Indian Civil Service. By this time, mainly because of the machinations of the British, considerable polarisation on religious lines had taken place in India and the Muslim League emerged as a powerful communal party under the leadership of Mohammad Ali Jinnah. However, their hold on the Muslim masses was still at best tenuous. In Bengal the Muslim League represented mostly the Muslim landowners and the small Muslim middle class and clergy. The bulk of the Muslim peasants were the supporters of the Krishak Praja Party led by Abul Kashem Fazlul Haq. Although supported almost entirely by the Muslim peasantry, Haq was not a particularly communal person, and the culture in his party developed accordingly. Thus there were three comparable political parties in Bengal, namely, the Congress, Muslim League and Krishak Praja Party.

After the elections were over it was found that none of the Parties had got a majority. In such circumstances the logical thing would have been for the Congress to form a coalition with the Krishak Praja Party which had the support of the Muslim masses and was relatively secular in character. However, for some inexplicable reason the Congress High Command refused to give permission to the Provincial Unit to form this coalition. This was a mistake that cost Bengali Hindus very dearly in perpetuity. Had this coalition been formed, perhaps the whole of Bengal would have remained part of India. As a result of this short-sightedness of the Congress, the Muslim League and the Krishak Praja Party together formed a coalition brokered by a Bengali Hindu Industrialist called Nalini Ranjan Sarker.

After formation of this coalition, the Muslim League

gradually gobbled up the Krishak Praja Party and began to introduce draconian legislation in the Province that favoured Muslims and worked against Hindus. At this stage Hindus were far ahead of Muslims in Bengal in terms of educational and professional attainments. This Ministry's attempt was to negate this advantage by totally stopping the entry of Hindus in Government services without any regard for qualification or experience. Fazlul Haq himself was inducted into the Muslim League and was persuaded to move the infamous Pakistan resolution at the Lahore.

### **Conference of the Muslim League in 1940.**

Meanwhile Hindus of Bengal, being persecuted in this manner, were looking for a leader who could look after their interests. As a result the elders of the community who could see clearly that Bengali Hindus were an endangered lot under this Ministry turned to Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee and persuaded him to leave field of education and enter the rough and tumble of politics. He thus came out of "academic seclusion" and became politically active. He once wrote later that, "My tendencies lay in the sphere of educational administration and I did not feel attracted by the noisy and dusty career of a politician. I thought the best way to serve my country would be through the path of education." Some have also observed that Dr. Mookerjee was "impelled to leave the university and enter the political arena due to the miserable plight of the Bengal Hindus who were being systematically humiliated and despoiled by the Muslim League with the connivance of the British for the great sin of patriotism."

Dr. Mookerjee's activism in politics also came at a difficult time. The Congress was powerful in Bengal but was, as always, hesitant to speak for the rights of the Hindus, often bowing down to Muslim League pressure tactics. The Communist Party of India was the other element, which supported the Muslim League but called the Hindu Mahasabha or any other organisations that spoke up for the Hindus as "communal and reactionary." Interestingly the Communist attitude has not changed even now, after nearly

seven decades. Among those who were instrumental in bringing Dr. Mookerjee into politics were N.C. Chatterjee (father of former Lok Sabha Speaker, Somnath Chatterjee), himself a well-known barrister at the Calcutta High Court, Ashutosh Lahiri, Justice Manmatha Nath Mookerjee and Swami Pranavananda (Founder of the Bharat Sevashram Sangha). Dr. Mookerjee derived great inspiration and support from Swami Pranavanandaji.

Vinayak Damodar 'Veer' Savarkar, the All-India Hindu Mahasabha leader came to Bengal in August-September, 1939 and Dr. Mookerjee came in close contact with him and joined the Hindu Mahasabha. By this act he came directly into politics. His entry was welcomed by Mahatma Gandhi who was greatly impressed by his thoroughly nationalistic outlook and told him that "somebody was needed to lead the Hindus after Malviyaji (Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya)..." Dr. Mookerjee is said to have replied, "but you will call me communal". Gandhiji replied "like Siva could drink poison after churning the sea, somebody must be there to drink the poison of Indian politics. It could be you". In fact Gandhiji, without ever saying so in as many words, had a deep appreciation of Dr. Mookerjee's ability. It was at his insistence that Nehru had included him as Minister of Industry and Supply in free India's first Cabinet in 1947. In the first one year of his joining the Mahasabha, Dr. Mookerjee extensively toured Bengal calling upon the Hindus to sink their differences and to unite. His energetic political leadership infused in the Hindu Mahasabha in Bengal greater strength and cohesiveness. As one of his biographers, noted, "For the first and the last time the Hindus of Bengal found a spokesman who did not care at all for political expediency or personal interest."

Within one year of Dr. Mookerjee's joining politics Savarkar appointed him, in view of his own illness, the Working President of All India Hindu Mahasabha. This enabled Dr. Mookerjee to tour the length and breadth of the country taking his message to a wider cross-section and in the process Dr. Mookerjee, himself, became an all-India

leader. He was noticed all over the country and his courage, determination for the cause, his organisational and his oratorical skills and tireless capacity for reaching out to the people and his decisive leadership quickly propelled him to all-India fame and he became a rallying point for Hindus all over the country. It was in 1940, when in Lahore that he addressed a “rally of Rashtriya Swayamevak Sangh” and observed that “I see in this organisation the one silver lining in the cloudy sky of India.”

Dr. Mookerjee, once having entered politics, spared no pains to fight the sinister designs of the Muslim League Government of Bengal. The Government was trying to take Secondary Education out of the purview of the University with a view to bringing it directly under the Government and Muslimise it. As secondary education in Bengal was under the purview of the Calcutta University and since taking control of the Calcutta University was difficult for the Muslim League, the League decided to weaken the institution by taking secondary education out of its academic jurisdiction and give it over to a Secondary Education Board which would have a majority of League nominated members on it. Dr. Mookerjee could not accept this and remain silent, in fact, this Bill, when introduced in the Bengal Assembly, saw him come out in full force against it. He generated a debate in the House, organised movements outside and mobilised public opinion against this Bill which would, he argued, “give educational administration” in Bengal an “aggressively communal turn.” In opposing the Secondary Education Bill, Dr. Mookerjee displayed his great skill and deftness in using constitutional means to push forward the political point and objective. His excellence and expertise in this was so high that he managed to win over the other parties. Dr. Mookerjee as a Hindu Mahasabha leader managed to persuade the Congress to support him in this opposition and stoutly resisted the Bill in the Legislative Council. His successful resistance of the Secondary Education Bill “purely through constitutional means, without once taking the fight to the streets, once again

showed the quality of the man as a constitutional and parliamentary politician.”

The other modus operandi of the Muslim League was to foment riots, especially in Eastern Bengal. There were serious anti-Hindu pogroms at this time in Dhaka, Noakhali and Narayanganj (all now in Bangladesh). Dr. Mookerjee wanted to proceed to Dhaka to quell these riots in spite of great opposition by the British Government. The plane for Dhaka on which he requested a seat left without him but not one to be daunted, Dr. Mookerjee, at great risk, travelled in a small mono-plane. On reaching Dhaka – he was the “first Hindu non-official from outside” to reach the city – he defied every attempt to stop him from entering the city and went straight to the palace of the Nawab of Dhaka and persuaded the Nawab to cooperate with him in stopping the pogroms. He stayed back in Dhaka for the next few days at the house of the famous nationalist historian R.C.Majumdar, who was then Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University and visited the strife torn areas to inspire confidence among those affected. Such display of exemplary courage and fearlessness would often be seen in Dr. Mookerjee’s life. He also wanted the rest of India to know what happened in Dhaka and also about the nefarious actions of the Muslim League but since there was a gag on the press, the only other way of highlighting the issue was to raise it in the Assembly. Again, displaying great political sagacity, Dr. Mookerjee wired Mahatma Gandhi asking for his support, Gandhiji, in turn, asked the then Congress President to direct the Congress Legislators in Bengal to support Dr. Mookerjee’s move of raising the issue on the floor of the House. Thus the whole country came to know of the happenings in Dhaka.

In 1941, Dr. Mookerjee managed to persuade Fazlul Haq to leave the company of the Muslim League and form a Ministry with the Congress and Hindu Mahasabha. Fazlul Haq was to be the Chief Minister and the second man was to be Sarat Chandra Bose while Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee was to be a member of the Cabinet. However, the British Governor

of Bengal, Sir John Herbert, a scheming India-hater, got Sarat Chandra Bose arrested under Defence of India Rules and got him transferred to a jail in South India. There-after, there was no chance of his inclusion in the Cabinet and Dr. Mookerjee became the principal Hindu face in the Cabinet. Because of the past association with Fazlul Haq Dr. Mookerjee ran the Cabinet very well, so much so that the Cabinet, formally called Progressive Democratic coalition, came to be popularly called the “Syama–Haq cabinet.”

This coalition provided a secular administration in the state and after four years of persecution Hindus could expect to be treated at par with Muslims. Through his deft handling of the finance ministry and other governance issues Dr. Mookerjee ensured a smooth functioning of the ministry. In a letter to the Bengal Governor, in July 1942, Dr. Mookerjee wrote that “for the first time in the history of British India, whatever democratic constitution has been handed over to us, in spite of its manifold defects, was sought to be worked in Bengal by Hindu and Muslims representatives who wielded considerable influence over their own community. The success of this experiment naturally would give a lie direct to the plea of communal disharmony standing in the way of India’s political advancement.”

The Muslim League was completely sidelined and the British were at a loss to see for the first time their divide and rule policy fail. Dr. Mookerjee “was determined to demonstrate that, in matters of state administration, Hindu and Muslim representatives could work together in a spirit of common understanding.” He was of the firm opinion that even in a difficult state like Bengal, “if leaders were in a position to assure their communities that their interests were being well looked after and once this public confidence was established, mischief-makers” would naturally become powerless and eventually dissolve. The story goes that a few Muslims leaders in Haq’s party who had earlier opposed Dr. Mookerjee were uncomfortable with this arrangement and approached Haq in protest. Haq is said to have replied, “listen you do not

know, Dr. Mookerjee, I do. He is the son of Sir Asutosh. It doesn’t matter that he belongs to the Hindu Mahasabha. You will not find a more liberal person or a better well-wisher of Muslims among Hindus. If you trust me you must trust him too.” A widespread feeling of relief was felt among the people to see the Muslim League ministry dissolve. Hindus of Bengal were especially relieved because the League ministry between 1937 and 1941 had discriminated against them and had “retarded the real progress of Bengal as a whole.”

However, this was not to last very long. Bengal Governor Herbert hated this Ministry and by using machinations dismissed it in 1942. In the mean time the Congress gave a call for ‘Quit India’ and all Congressmen were promptly put in jail.

Meanwhile in Bengal a Tsunami hit the town of Contai in Midnapore District in October, 1942 killing some 30,000 people in fifteen minutes. As a result, a huge number of people were orphaned. Also at that time the Japanese advanced in South-east Asia and took over Burma, throwing out the British. As a result of this Herbert launched a scorched earth policy. The bulk of foodstuff not needed for the military was deliberately destroyed. Similarly, means of transportation for such foodstuff were also destroyed. As a result of this, price of rice arose from Rs. 2/- per maund (about 36 kilos) to about Rs.100/- per maund. There was a famine in which an estimated 15 Lakhs of people perished. The colonial government also attempted to withhold relief to the affected area because of strong nationalist feeling and revolutionary zeal displayed by the people. Dr. Mookerjee, however, plunged into famine relief work and consolidated the different Organisations set up for such relief and coordinated their work. But for his act the number of casualties would have been many times more and India as a whole would have never come to know of this tragedy. Dr. Mookerjee also resigned from the cabinet when he realised that autonomy was a farce and that Indian ministers were obstructed at every step by the British civil servants and the Governor. He

was particularly incensed that repression was let loose on the people, and after trying to unsuccessfully talk to the Viceroy and negotiate with the British government so that they could step back and allow the formation of an “Indian National Government” and declare that “freedom is formally recognised”, Dr. Mookerjee while resigning said, “The reign of repression that we have witnessed in India since August last [August 1942] has been directed not only against a so-called subversive movement but against every form of nationalist activities, calculated to mobilise the will-powers of Indians to throw off a foreign rule that they intensely dislike.”

At this stage the Second World War was raging and all Congress leaders were in jail but Muslim League leaders were all outside and ruling in Bengal. The British Government observed that the health of Mahatma Gandhi was deteriorating and decided to release him for fear that his death in jail might precipitate further trouble. Then C.Rajagopalachari met Mahatma Gandhi and persuaded him to speak to Jinnah in order to reach a settlement on the partition of the country. The talks were held and proved to be abortive. But in the talks Gandhi and C.R. practically conceded Pakistan. Before talks began Dr. Mookerjee repeatedly advised Mahatma Gandhi not to concede anything but they did not listen to him and Jinnah had his way.

In 1945 the Second World War ended and the Congress leaders were released from Jail and hailed as great heroes. An election in the Central Legislative Council was held. Before the election Dr. Mookerjee tried to work out a common ground with the Congress in order to fight the League. But Sarat Chandra Bose was adamant and did not give any space to Dr. Mookerjee. By this time there was complete polarisation in the country on religious lines – Hindus in favour of Congress and Muslims in favour of Muslim League. The Muslim parties which had opposed the League e.g. Krishak Praja Party in Bengal and Unionist Party in Punjab either folded up or merged with the League and Allah Baksh, an important Muslim leader of Sind who stood firmly to oppose

the League was assassinated. As a result of this polarisation Dr. Mookerjee was very ignominiously defeated by a nonentity of the Congress. Not only so but he suffered a heart attack in the process of electioneering and was completely bedridden.

In 1946 the Multi-Party War Cabinet in Britain was replaced by the Labour Party, and Clement Attlee as the new Prime Minister sent a high-power committee called the Cabinet Mission to work out means of granting India independence. The Cabinet Mission made a plan called Grouping Plan by which India would have remained one. This was initially accepted by both the Congress and Muslim League. At this stage Jawahar Lal Nehru replaced Maulana Abul Kalam Azad as the President of the Congress and immediately thereafter without consulting anyone Nehru resiled from the acceptance of the Grouping Plan. Jinnah withdrew his acceptance also and announced “Direct Action Day” on August 16, 1946. On this day there was a bloodbath in Calcutta between Hindus and Muslims for four days in which an estimated 15,000 people died. Dr. Mookerjee by this time had become a member of the Provincial Legislative Council of Bengal. The Government of Bengal at this time was being run by the Muslim League under the leadership of Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy who masterminded the entire carnage. In the Provincial Council, Dr. Mookerjee lambasted Suhrawardy’s role in perpetrating the riots. He also actively organised a resistance to this pogrom and worked to bring in normalcy in the city. Surprisingly no All-India Congress Leader visited Calcutta after this riot, probably for fear of being called anti-Muslim.

However after this, Congress practically conceded partition. Meanwhile Lord Mountbatten had become Viceroy of India and he and his wife had persuaded Jawaharlal Nehru to accept partition. On 3<sup>rd</sup> June, 1947 the British Prime Minister made an announcement of granting independence to India and partitioning the same. In this announcement he also said that the province of Bengal and Punjab would also be partitioned.

After it became settled that India would be partitioned, the partition of Muslim-majority Bengal was forced by Dr. Mookerjee by creating public opinion in favour of a homeland for Bengali Hindus and attaching the Hindu areas of Bengal to India. Dr. Mookerjee began to build and mobilise public opinion in favour of the proposal. His cogent arguments and “forceful advocacy of the scheme for the partition of Bengal succeeded in winning over a large number of leaders in Bengal, including Congressmen to his side. In March 1947, Bengali Hindu Members of the Central Assembly adopted a resolution with the support of the N.C.Chatterjee of Hindu Mahasabha and General A.C.Chatterjee of the INA. Following this Dr. Mookerjee convened a well-attended two-day conference of Hindu representative from all parts of Bengal. Apart from Hindu Mahasabha Members a large number of other representatives convened from all over the province.

Leading intellectuals and scholars like R.C.Majumdar, Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterji, the veteran revolutionary Hemendra Prasad Ghosh, Lord Sinha, Dr. Radha Kumud Mookerjee among others, also participated. The conference unanimously passed a resolution that a “separate province must be created comprising the Hindu majority areas in Bengal...” So widespread was the support for Dr. Mookerjee’s scheme of partitioning Bengal that an opinion poll held by the leading daily *Amrita Bazar Patrika* in April showed that 98.6 per cent voted “yea”, with only 0.6 per cent favouring a united Bengal. In April, Dr. Mookerjee met the Viceroy Mountbatten and pointed out why the partition of Bengal was necessary. It was thus Dr. Mookerjee’s forceful intervention and leadership that saved a portion of Bengal and saved the historic and strategically important city of Calcutta from going to Muslim League ruled Pakistan. This was, arguably, the greatest achievement of Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee’s life. The Muslim League had opposed this partition because they wanted the whole of Bengal, particularly Calcutta, to remain in Pakistan. When they found that they would not achieve this directly, they influenced some discredited Congress

leaders of Bengal and tried to float the concept of Sovereign United Bengal independent of India or Pakistan. Dr. Mookerjee fought and managed to kill the idea.

After India became independent on 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1947, Dr. Mookerjee was in Hindu Mahasabha, while the power was transferred by the British wholly to the Congress. Earlier in February 1946, Dr. Mookerjee was elected unopposed to Bengal Legislative Assembly from the Calcutta University Constituency, his old constituency and in July that year, so high was his popularity and acceptance and towering political personality that he was nominated to the Constituent Assembly of India by the Bengal Congress to work for the framing of a new Constitution. His performance in the Constituent Assembly was captivating and displayed his old skill in the parliamentary set up. The following intervention he made, on one occasion, in reply to some suggestion which was made with the aim of obstructing the working of the Constituent Assembly was remarkable for its boldness. Dr. Mookerjee sensed that some colonial officials may have been behind this, “I would say Sir”, he began, “that we should say to the British people once for all, “We want to remain friendly with you. You started your career as traders. You came here as supplicants before the Great Mughal. You wanted to exploit the wealth of the country. Luck was in your favour. By forgery, fraud and force you succeeded in establishing – these are all matters of history – you governed this country but not with the willing cooperation of the people of this land. You introduced separate electorates; you introduced religion into Indian politics. That was not done by Indians. You did it only to perpetuate your rule in this country.”

Dr. Mookerjee’s mastery of parliamentary procedure, his skill in parliamentary debate made him instantly admired and popular. “His position as one of the topmost public figures” with a great “record of service in the cause of the country’s independence” was nationally recognised. He had also become the undisputed leader of Bengal by then. Even though he still led the Hindu

Mahasabha, Mahatma Gandhi insisted that Dr. Mookerjee be included in free India's first Cabinet. Gandhiji argued that independence had come as a joint effort and because of the struggle of all "nationalist forces" in the country and not only the Congress and therefore wanted a wide representation of leaders in the first cabinet making it truly a national government. Dr. Mookerjee was initially hesitant because he saw Congress's "pitiabile cowardice" in acceding to partition. But like Gandhiji, Veer Savarkar too wanted him to join the cabinet as that would give him an opportunity to work and serve independent India and strengthen the national government. Savarkar was not parochial; he saw independent India's first government as a national government that had to work to strengthen India's sovereignty and integrity. It was the Congress and its leaders who displayed parochialism and tried to obliterate Veer Savarkar's contribution to India's freedom struggle. Dr. Mookerjee joined the government and was made the Minister for Industry and Supply, though his natural inclination and area of expertise was in the field of education. Had he been given the portfolio of education, his field of specialisation since his youth, Dr. Mookerjee could have perhaps given a new direction to India's national education policy and also work to mould young minds in the ideal of nationalism and national service. But the industrial and economic challenges facing the country were also immense and Dr. Mookerjee was the only leader capable and experienced to address them at such a crucial time.

It must be mentioned here that Sardar Patel was very much in favour of Dr. Mookerjee being included in the first cabinet of free India. Sardar Patel greatly admired Dr. Mookerjee's historic role in demanding a partition of Bengal and thus saving a part of it from Jinnah's Pakistan leading to a partition of Pakistan itself. He also admired Dr. Mookerjee's refusal and opposition to the Muslim League's pipe dream of a "sovereign, independent Bengal." His leadership on both issues had saved India and Hindus. As one of Patel's biographer notes, "Mookerjee, who represented the Hindu

Mahasabha, had gained the Sardar's favour by demanding Bengal's partition in March 1947 and by refusing to join an abortive bid for a united and independent Bengal that Sarat Bose and Suhrawardy made in April and May [1947]."

Sardar Patel played a decisive role in inducting both Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Dr. Mookerjee in the cabinet. On the other hand Dr. Mookerjee was a great support to Sardar Patel and always worked to strengthen his hands in his great effort to create the Indian Union. Especially in the case of Hyderabad, he constantly stood by Sardar Patel and demanded action thus earning Nehru's wrath. While a Minister, he had serious differences with other leaders of Hindu Mahasabha, over the direction the party must take in independent India. He wanted the Mahasabha to evolve and grow with times developing a new perspective. Eventually Dr. Mookerjee's advise on these future directions were not taken and he left the Party in 1948. He was then a leader without a party and he continued in this way until 1950.

### **As Free India's First Industry Minister**

It is inspiring to see the work Dr. Mookerjee did as Industry and Supply Minister in a short span of little over two years. His "experience as finance minister of undivided Bengal and his general grasp of things were a determining factor." In fact, this gave him an "opportunity to lay the foundations of India's industrial policy and prepare the ground for the industrial development of the country in the years to come. "The loss to education and cultural life was thus a gain to the economy and industry." One of Dr. Mookerjee's early biographers notes, "His record of work as minister for industry and supply for two and a half years he remained in office amply justified the faith and trust that had been put in him. He brought his solid intellectual grasp and realistic understanding of the problems of industrialisation in a predominantly agricultural country, whose industrial growth had been deliberately checked by the unsympathetic foreign government." Dr. Mookerjee's "intellectual eminence, mental alertness and rock-like integrity" evoked spontaneous respect

and fullest cooperation from all sections among the officers. “Even his political opponents praised the way he handled the industrial problems and formulated industrial policies in the most formative years of independent India.” Dr. Mookerjee had a clear perception of the industrial direction that India needed to take and was convinced that in a de-industrialised country like India which had just achieved political independence the “primary task was to mobilise all resources, private and governmental, for a cooperative effort to make the country self-sufficient in essential goods, particularly those needed for the defence of the country.”

Dr. Mookerjee’s great contribution in setting the motion for India’s industrial development has never been discussed and has never found place in history books. It would be interesting to see in some detail the work he did as free India’s first Industry Minister and also try and understand some of his thoughts in this field. In those early years, Dr. Mookerjee thought that the best method would be to give “full scope to private enterprise under suitable government regulation and control, to play its part in India’s industrialisation. He wanted the state to utilise its meagre resources for developing that sector of the industry whose growth was essential for the defence of the country but for which private capital was not [then] readily forthcoming. He, thus, wanted a rational coordination, in the light of the actual conditions in the country, between private and public enterprise for speedy but orderly industrialisation of the country. In formulating this policy, he was guided solely by a realistic assessment of the needs and circumstances of the country and not by abstract theories or dogmas, to which he had no attachment.”

This was a time when failed economic theories were vigorously propagated by Communist ideologues trained in the West and who were eager to develop a proletarian paradise in India. This was also a period when Communists put up a resistance to India’s industrial march by repeated obstructionism through violent strikes and *bandhs*. Dr. Mookerjee always stood for cooperation between “labour and

capital in the interest of increasing production. The theory of class struggle as a means of progress never appealed to his rational mind.” Yet he did not support cooperation of labour all on the terms of the employers. “He was all for profit sharing between capital and labour so as to enable labour to develop a genuine interest in the industry. While his solicitude for the welfare of labour inspired confidence in the labour, his realistic and practical approach to the problem of capital reassured employers.”

“With an open mind” Dr. Mookerjee “judged every scheme and policy by the criteria of its practicability and usefulness to the people.” Apart from the basic objections to total nationalisation, he was convinced that India lacked the requisite resources, experience and trained personnel to nationalise all industries and still run them efficiently.” He emphasised on laying a strong industrial foundation, on developing a robust economic framework and on skilling youth. His speeches during this period point to his vision and ideas. Speaking to the science and technology association of the Delhi Polytechnic sometime in 1949 he observed that the “economic safety of the vast masses of the people – their economic security, their standards of living – is the foundation on which all political institutions rest. Political freedom therefore, has neither meaning nor stability unless its economic contents are realised.” He observed that a “widespread technological revolution in industry and agriculture” was required to raise the standards of living of the general masses. Referring to the effort being made on the industrial front Dr. Mookerjee noted that spade work was being done for the “establishment of a number of very vital industries and when these industries are actually established they will form the solid ground work on which economic development of our country may proceed.” The Government of India’s declaration of an industrial policy in 1948 saw the reflection of Dr. Mookerjee’s ideas. This declaration “envisaged a mixed economy, with overall responsibility of ensuring planned development and regulation of industries in national development lying with the government.” Dr.

Mookerjee also gave great emphasis on developing and re-energising India's cottage and small scale industries and during his tenure between 1948 and 1950, the All India Handicrafts Board, the All India Handloom Board and the Khadi and Village Industries Board were set up to "supply the much needed organisation and finance required by cottage and small scale industries to survive and develop." The Textile Research Institutes were also conceived in his tenure. In July 1948 the Industrial Finance Corporation – "a government-sponsored institution acting as an investment banker, collecting private savings on government guarantee of repayment and distributing them in form of advances and long-term loans to industrial borrowers" – was formed.

As a Minister, Dr Mookerjee was credited with several pioneering schemes, such as Damodar Valley Corporation, Sindri Fertilizer Factory, Chittaranjan Locomotive Works and Hindusthan Aircraft Factory of Bangalore – these were among the four most successful gigantic projects of free India. He also brought about great improvement in the Cotton Textile Industry including Handloom. In line with the plan to achieve self-sufficiency in some key sectors, under the initiative of Dr. Mookerjee, in 1948 the locomotive factory at Chittaranjan in West Bengal was started and the first Indian locomotive from assembled parts "named *Deshbandhu*, was produced in 1950." Dr. Mookerjee reconstituted the Hindusthan Aircraft Factory into a limited company and saw to it that it undertook the assembling of jet aircrafts for the Indian Air Force, manufactured the HT 2, a "trainer aircraft for civilian and defence purposes" and also "manufactured all-steel rail coaches for the Indian Railways and bus bodies for various State and private transport authorities." Thus, the losses the company incurred in the "first two years after the War were covered by profits in 1947-48 and 1948-49 under the able chairmanship of Dr. Mookerjee. The company's sales in 1949-1950 amounted to about Rs. 2 crores. The then new model third class coaches of the Indian Railways manufactured by the Hindusthan Aircraft factory was the

result of Dr. Mookerjee's personal interest in the matter.

The steel plant at Bhilai was initially conceived by Dr. Mookerjee. His proactive approach to the project and detailed survey of whether it was feasible in the surroundings earmarked for it, demonstrated how thorough he was an administrator. "His dream of establishing a new steel plant to improve the quantity and quality of steel production in India was fulfilled in 1955", when the agreement for setting up the Bhilai Steel plant came up. It was during Dr. Mookerjee's tenure that steps for the manufacturing of newsprint were initiated by setting up of the National Newsprint and Papers Mills limited in Central Provinces (Madhya Pradesh). Similarly the setting up of the fertiliser factory at Sindri, near Dhanbad in Bihar, finally took off at the behest of Dr. Mookerjee, who was keen that India achieve self-sufficiency in the production of fertilisers. As always his long term vision on this front saw "this vast and modern factory" go into production in October 1951.

Similarly the multi-purpose Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC) was another great achievement of Dr. Mookerjee. His deft stewardship saw the Central Government and Bihar and Bengal Government come together to cooperate for the establishment of this corporation for the development of the Damodar Valley which spanned both the states. It is a tribute to Dr. Mookerjee's far-seeing vision that DVC was created and one of its chief function was "the promotion and operation of schemes for irrigation, water supply, generation and transmission of energy – hydro-electric and thermal", the implementation of schemes for flood control in the Damodar River, promotion of "public health and of agriculture, industrial and economic well-being in the Damodar Valley and the adjoining areas."

Along with these large and gigantic industrial schemes Dr. Mookerjee was also acutely sensitive to small industries and worked hard to alleviate their plight and to improve their condition and strengthen their base. His

intervention on behalf of about 200 small cottage factories manufacturing match by hand and situated mostly in Tamil Nadu, is a case in point. A Swedish combine produced matches in bulk in factories situated all over India and the cottage factories “complained of their critical condition on account of the severe competition from the former and the loss of West Pakistan markets due to partition.” Dr. Mookerjee addressed the grievances of the South Indian cottage match manufacturers by “giving considerable relief in excise duty on handmade matches, making sufficient for import of the required raw materials and facilitating transport for the small-scale producers to move their goods to reach all destinations.” His ministry also directed the Madras Government to bring these “cottage industry workers under a cooperative organisation and finance them using its funds for facilitating supply of raw materials and distribution of finished products so as to eliminate 90 per cent of their troubles.”

In a similar manner he addressed the problems and challenges faced by the woollen handloom industry “not only for India’s export trade but also for keeping the cottage workers perennially employed.” 75 per cent of this industry was concentrated in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Kashmir and Rajasthan. Dr. Mookerjee identified the problems and solved them in a concerted manner. To tackle the problem of imparting of technical guidance to workers in this sector, he proposed to start the Central Wool Technological Institute which “would turn out students trained in all phases of manufacture and willing to instruct the village workers in improved appliances.” To address the issue of marketing, Dr. Mookerjee promoted the idea of the Central Cottage Emporium in Delhi “to market and advertise the goods made in the provinces.” India’s Trade Commissioners abroad were directed to organise exhibitions, sales and publicity drives to push Indian handloom products. For the improvement of the age-old Indian silk industry, Dr. Mookerjee gave it a new impetus by establishing the Central Silk Board in 1949.

Similarly he also worked to improve and place on a sound footing, both cotton handloom and textile industries in India.

An interesting incident demonstrates how conscientious and meticulous Dr. Mookerjee was in the running of his ministry. A whisper campaign was started by an interested section about a “shady transaction by some officers of the stores section of the supply department. They were alleged to have sold huge stocks of toothbrushes and combs for a paltry sum, though they were worth much more. Questions on the subject had been tabled in the Parliament. Files about the whole affair, with usual notes, were submitted to Dr. Mookerjee by the office staff at about 9.30 am.” At about 10.30 a.m. he went to Parliament and at once began to answer:

**Q. Is it a fact that a very small price had been obtained for a large quantity of these articles?**

A. Yes.

**Q. Is it a fact that the articles were in good condition?**

A. Some were in good condition others were bad.

**Q. Were these articles so bad that they could not fetch a good price?**

A. Yes. And immediately Dr. Mookerjee produced from his pocket a number of toothbrushes absolutely devoid of bristles. The members looked at these worthless articles and were taken aback, being at a loss to comprehend how they could be offered for sale. Officers of his own department were puzzled as to how he could equip himself with such effective materials within such a short time.”

During this period, as President of the Mahabodhi Society of India, Dr. Mookerjee took the lead in forging a link with Buddhist nations of South-east Asia, chiefly Burma (now Myanmar) and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), Cambodia and Tibet (not yet annexed by the Chinese). In order to further cement these ties, Dr. Mookerjee brought the relics of two chief

disciples of Buddha, Mahamoggallana and Sariputta, from England and at the invitation of the leaders from the Southeast Asian region, Dr. Mookerjee took a portion of the sacred relics to these countries and received a royal welcome. The legendary Cambodian monarch Prince Norodom Sihanouk (1922-2012) invited him with the relics and more than half a million people turned up to listen to Dr. Mookerjee speak on the message of Buddha and of how India and the countries of Southeast Asia could work together to bring in a new Asian age. It was due to Dr. Mookerjee's indefatigable efforts that a portion of these sacred relics were presented to the people of Burma from the Government of India, as a "permanent loan." The relics were installed at the legendary Kaba Aye Pagoda then in the outskirts of Yangon. The Burmese Prime Minister, U Nu, wrote to him saying that his people shall forever remain grateful to Dr. Mookerjee for this great sacred act of friendship. It was again due to the efforts of Dr. Mookerjee that these relics were installed at a newly constructed Vihara, adjacent to the ancient Vihara in Sanchi near Bhopal.

### **Pakistan's Perfidy**

In February, 1950 the East Pakistan Government launched an anti-Hindu pogrom all over East Pakistan with the intention of de-Hinduising that country. Until then the Hindus had a very large share of the cultural and intellectual space in East Pakistan and constituted the majority of professors, school teachers, Lawyers, Doctors and other professionals. As a result of this pogrom, there was a huge exodus of Hindus into India specially West Bengal, Tripura and Assam. According to Nehru the solution to this problem lay in working out an agreement with Liaquat Ali Khan, Prime Minister of Pakistan and he proceeded to do the same. Dr. Mookerjee argued that this was totally an irrational thing to do because it was the Liaquat Ali Government itself which had started the pogrom and there was no point in making an agreement with it. However, Nehru did not listen to him, as a result of which Dr. Mookerjee had no alternative but to resign from the Cabinet. Sardar Patel and a number of Dr.

Mookerjee's colleagues in the central cabinet wanted him to continue. Together with him the other central Minister from Bengal, K.C. Neogy also resigned. The surging crowd that came to receive Dr. Mookerjee at the Howrah Station in Kolkata, when he arrived from Delhi after resignation is said to have been phenomenal.

Meanwhile the folly that Jawaharlal Nehru committed in Jammu & Kashmir, probably under the influence of Lord Mountbatten, is well known. When the Maharaja did not sign the Instrument of Accession in time but vacillated, Pakistan sent its soldiers in disguise as Pathan tribesmen to take over the State. All the approaches to Jammu & Kashmir at that time were from Pakistan – approach to Jammu from Sialkot, approach to Srinagar from Rawalpindi through Jhelum valley. The Maharaja signed the instrument as laid down on 26<sup>th</sup> October, 1947. The Indian Army and Air Force thereafter acted with great courage and speed and entered Jammu & Kashmir from Pathankot, scaled the Pir Panjal Mountains, reached Srinagar and began to chase the marauders out of the Valley. When the Indian Army was in hot pursuit, Nehru suddenly declared a unilateral cease-fire and announced that there would be a plebiscite in the State supervised by the United Nations. In the annals of warfare, perhaps, there were few examples of such supreme short-sightedness. The so-called Kashmir problem arose as a result of this and continues to this day. A part of the State covering the Mirpur and Muzaffarabad strip together with Gilgit and Skardu remained in the hands of Pakistan. A part of this subsequently was ceded by Pakistan to China.

Following this, Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah was installed as the 'Prime Minister' (not Chief Minister) of the State of Jammu & Kashmir and Yuvraj Karan Singh as the Sadar-i-Riyasat (not Rajpramukh as was done in case of other Indian princely States). Abdullah started treating the State as almost independent. Not only that, he also adopted a totally step-motherly attitude towards the people of Jammu & Ladakh as opposed to those of the Vale of Kashmir.

## Formation of Jana Sangh

Dr. Mookerjee meanwhile was a leader without party. At this stage he met Sri Guruji Golwalkar, Sarsanghchalak of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh who asked him to start a Party for whom the RSS would give him some of its ablest workers. Among the people that were given were Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya, Balraj Madhok, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Kushabhau Thakre, Nanaji Deshmukh, Sundar Singh Bhandari, Jagdish Mathur and several others. Dr. Mookerjee held a series of meetings with the leaders from all over the country, and after deliberating on several ideas and several names, finally founded Bharatiya Jan Sangh (BJS). Its formation was announced in a meeting held at Delhi at Raghomal Arya Kanya Vidyalay on 21<sup>st</sup> October, 1951 and was followed by a huge public meeting in Gandhi Grounds in front of Gurudwara Sisganj in Old Delhi.

In his Presidential address before the mammoth gathering Dr. Mookerjee said, "Our party must continue to function (even after the forthcoming general election, in 1951-1952) carrying a message of hope and goodwill to all classes of people and try to draw out from them their best efforts in rebuilding a happier and more prosperous free India...One of the chief reasons for the manifestation of dictatorship in Congress rule is the absence of well organised opposition parties which alone can act as a healthy check on the majority party...Bharatiya Jana Sangh emerges today as an all India political party which will function as the principal party in opposition...we have thrown our party open to all citizens of India irrespective of caste, creed or community. While we recognise that in matters of customs, habit, religion and language Bharat presents a unique diversity, the people must be united by a bond of fellowship and understanding inspired by a deep devotion and loyalty to the support of a common motherland...While it will be dangerous to encourage growth of political minorities on the basis of caste and religion, it is obviously for the vast majority of Bharat's population to assure all classes of people who are truly loyal to their motherland

that they will be entitled to full protection under the law and to build equality in all matters of social, economic and political. Our party gives this assurance unreservedly...Our party believes that the future of Bharat lies in the proper appreciation and application of Bharatiya *sanskriti* and *maryada*."

Referring to Pakistan, Dr. Mookerjee called for "a policy of strict reciprocity." Talking about Kashmir, Dr. Mookerjee said, "Our party feels that the case should be withdrawn from the United Nations and there should be no further question of plebiscite. Kashmir is an inalienable part of India and should be treated as any other State." Dr. Mookerjee was also very critical of Nehru, who had, by now, repeatedly started using the word "communal" against him. Dr. Mookerjee said, "Having repeatedly sacrificed Indian nationalism at the altar of Muslim communalism and even after partition having surrendered to the whims and howls of the Pakistan Government, it does not lie in the mouth of Pandit Nehru to accuse others of communalism. There is no communalism in India today except the new policy of Muslim appeasement which had been started by Pandit Nehru and his friends for the purpose of winning their vote at the forthcoming election. We have provincialism and other type of class or caste difference in the country today. Let us jointly try to remove these evils so as to lay a foundation of a truly democratic India." Dr. Mookerjee concluded his historic address with the following words, which still continue to inspire, "We enter upon our task with full faith, hope and courage. Let our workers constantly remember that only through service and sacrifice will they be able to win the confidence of mass of people. The great task of revitalising and reconstructing Bharat awaits us. The mother calls her children irrespective of class, caste or religion to come to her and serve her. However dark the present may be, Bharat has a great destiny to fulfil in the years to come. May our party, whose symbol in the forthcoming election is a humble earthen *Pradeep* [lamp], try to carry this light of hope and

unity, faith and courage to dispel darkness that surrounds the country. The journey has just begun. May providence endow us with strength and fortitude to remain ever on the right path, not cowed down by fears or tempted by favours and to help make Bharat great and strong specially so that she may become a fit and noble instrument in the preservation of wealth and prosperity.” Referring to Nehru’s threat, “I shall crush Jana Sangh”, Dr. Mookerjee said, “I say, I will crush this crushing, mentality of yours.” In 1951-1952 the first General Election took place in which the infant Jana Sangh got 3 seats – two from West Bengal and one from Rajasthan. Meanwhile the Kashmir problem continued to worsen. Dr. Mookerjee wrote to Nehru a number of times and there was a tripartite correspondence between him, Nehru and Sheikh Abdullah but with no result. Meanwhile the Praja Parishad, under the leadership of Pandit Premnath Dogra, began an agitation against Sheikh Abdullah and the neglect of Jammu. Dr. Mookerjee held a meeting with Pandit Dogra and completely identified himself and his party with the agitation. Meanwhile he had emerged as a fiery and had become the most vociferous speaker in the entire opposition and succeeded in not only uniting the opposition block but also in being recognised as the unofficial leader of opposition.

### **First Session of Jana Sangh**

The First annual session of Bharatiya Jana Sangh was held at Kanpur. This meeting saw the emergence of several young leaders of the Party among whom the foremost was a young RSS Pracharak called Deendayal Upadhyaya. Dr. Mookerjee also recruited a very young Swayamsevak called Atal Bihari Vajpayee as his Private Secretary, who later became the Prime Minister of India.

At this time there was a system in vogue whereby Indian citizens had to take a permit from the Union Defence Ministry to enter the State of Jammu & Kashmir. On being requested by Pandit Premnath Dogra, Dr. Mookerjee decided to travel to Jammu and to do so without a permit. He wanted to personally also survey the situation and the oppression

unleashed on the protestors by Sheikh Abdullah’s Government. Accordingly, on 8<sup>th</sup> May, 1953 he set out on a journey by passenger train from Delhi Railway Station accompanied by Guru Datt Vaid, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Tek Chand and Balraj Madhok along with a few members of the Press. He stopped at Ambala, Jullundur and Pathankot where he attended a huge public meeting. Before arriving at Pathankot near the border of East Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir, the Deputy Commissioner of the Gurudaspur District boarded the same Train at Gurdaspur and said that he would probably have to arrest Dr. Mookerjee if he tried to enter Jammu & Kashmir without a permit. However, by the time he reached the border at Madhopur, he was quite surprised to receive an order and told Dr. Mookerjee that he has been instructed to allow him and his companions to enter Jammu & Kashmir without a permit.

When Dr. Mookerjee and his companions reached the middle of the bridge over the Ravi river separating the two States, he was arrested by the police of Jammu & Kashmir State on the grounds that he was about to act in a manner prejudicial to public safety and peace. It is important to note here that he was not arrested for entering Jammu & Kashmir without a permit because until this day such a permit could be issued only by the Union Defence Ministry and a person could be arrested for entering Jammu & Kashmir without a permit only by Indian authorities and not by those of Jammu & Kashmir State. Yet significantly, Deputy Commissioner of Gurdaspur District had clear instruction not to arrest him but to let him enter Jammu & Kashmir. In retrospect this was very intriguing. It appears that he was cleverly pushed into Jammu & Kashmir without a permit, only to take him out of the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court of India. Had he been arrested at Gurdaspur, a petition of *Habeas Corpus* would have brought him out in no time.

### **Arrest in Kashmir**

Immediately upon arrest Dr. Mookerjee was put in a closed jeep and whisked away to Batote. There they spent

the night and were taken to Srinagar next morning where they were put in a small, secluded and bare cottage – a “concrete hut.” Apart from Dr. Mookerjee, Guru Datt Vaid and Tek Chand were also with him.

This cottage was converted into a Sub-Jail in which Dr. Mookerjee had to spend time under great difficulty and in very cramped and uncomfortable conditions. He had been medically advised to take long walks but he was not permitted to do so here. As a result, he suffered very excruciating pain in one leg. Surprisingly Nehru and Dr Katju, his Home and States Minister visited Srinagar on 24<sup>th</sup> May, 1953 but did not have the decency to look up Dr Mookerjee.

On the night of 19-20<sup>th</sup> June Dr. Mookerjee had pain in his chest and back along with a high temperature. The next day on 21<sup>st</sup> June his pain increased. On 22<sup>nd</sup> June, very early in the morning, his temperature fell and he broke into a sweat. At about 11.30 a.m. the Jail Superintendent reached his Cottage with a taxi (not an ambulance) and they walked Dr. Mookerjee from his bed to the taxi. Then he was moved, not to any Nursing Home but to the Gynaecological Ward of a State Hospital about ten miles away. Meanwhile Barrister U.M. Trivedi had come to Srinagar to move a petition for his bail. On 22<sup>nd</sup> June he went to visit Dr. Mookerjee and he stayed with him until about 7.15 p.m. and asked the attending physician what his true medical state was. The physician told Trivedi that there was no immediate cause for concern. But on 23<sup>rd</sup> June at about 3.45 a.m. Trivedi was woken up by the Superintendent and told to rush to Dr. Mookerjee's bed side. He and Pandit Premnath Dogra and the two co-detenues were also asked to go and when they reached the hospital at 4 a.m. they were informed that Dr. Mookerjee had breathed his last at 03.40 a.m.

This much is clear that Dr. Mookerjee had been subjected to the worst possible neglect, being put in a isolated Cottage which did not even have a telephone connection and not being allowed to walk and thereafter being made to walk

from his Cottage and brought to the Gynaecological Ward were all examples of such neglects. Mixed with this was Nehru's lack of decency in failing to look him up. Dr. Mookerjee at that time was a very prominent Parliamentarian and the de facto leader of the Opposition and a former Union Minister. Yet he was not put in any VIP Ward. One of his leading biographers, while working on his biography and Having enquired from two prominent doctors, gathered that Dr. Mookerjee must have suffered at least one or possibly two heart attacks while in the Cottage and was possibly suffering from DVT (Deep Vein Thrombosis). Upon interviewing his elder daughter, (now Late) Sabita Banerjee, one also came to know that that immediately before his death he had been injected with something which made his body burn and made him shout “*Humko Jal Raha Hai*”. This was told to her by Dr. Mookerjee's Nurse, Ms Rajdulari Tikkoo but is not corroborated.

The next day his dead body was flown to Calcutta which saw a sea of humanity following his cortege to the Keoratala Burning Ghat in south Kolkata, where in 1925 Deshbandhu C.R.Das's body was consigned to flames. The saddest and most regrettable event following his death was when Nehru refused Dr. Mookerjee's mother's request for an enquiry into the death of her son.

Whenever a leading public figure dies or disappears under suspicious circumstances there is always an enquiry, usually under the provisions Commissions of Enquiry Act 1952. As many as three such commissions had been constituted to conduct enquiry in relation to the disappearance of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose – the Shah Nawaz Commission (1956), the G.D.Khosla Commission (1970) and the Manoj Mukherjee Commission (1999). Mahatma Gandhi's assassination was probed by the Kapur Commission, Indira Gandhi's by the Thakkar Commission, Rajiv Gandhi's by two commissions – J.S.Verma Commission and M.C.Jain Commission. All these assassinations (except Netaji's disappearance), it must be

remembered, took place in public view, and therefore there was no doubt left in anyone's mind as to how the person died – the enquiry was needed to find out the background and the conspiracy behind it. Dr. Mookerjee's untimely and suspicious death, on the other hand, took place in secret, far away from family and friends, in hostile territory, beyond even the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court of India. It is therefore natural that Dr. Mookerjee's family, colleagues, admirers, party men and unrelated men who take an interest in public affairs would demand an enquiry into it.

The initiative was taken by Dr. Mookerjee's mother Jogmaya Devi, who, in reply to Nehru's condolence message dated 30<sup>th</sup> June 1953, addressed him on 4<sup>th</sup> July. She wrote: ". . . I am not writing to you to seek any consolation. But what I do demand of you is justice. My son died in detention—a detention without trial. In your letter you have tried to impress that Kashmir Government had done all that should have been done. You base your impression on the assurances and information you have received. What is the value, I ask, of such information when it comes from persons who themselves should stand a trial? You say, you had visited Kashmir during my son's detention. You speak of the affection you had for him. But what prevented you, I wonder, from meeting him there personally and satisfying yourself about his health and arrangements?"

Nehru refused the enquiry! The reply, dated 5<sup>th</sup> July, is, to say the least, astounding: "I can well understand a mother's sorrow and mental anguish at the death of a beloved son. No words of mine can soften the blow that you must have felt . . . I did not venture to write to you before without going into the matter of Dr. Mookerjee's detention and death fairly carefully. I have since enquired further into it from a number of persons who had occasion to know some facts. I can only say to you that I arrived at the clear and honest conclusion that there is no mystery in this and that Dr. Mookerjee was given every consideration".

It was an acutely perfunctory reply to a solemn and

rightful demand for an *enquiry* into the suspicious death of one of the foremost national leaders? "I have since enquired further into it from a *number of persons* who had *occasion* to know some *facts*" – what number? Which persons? What kind of occasion and which facts? Was his personal satisfaction, upon talking to an unspecified number of unnamed persons with unknown exposure, enough? Can the Prime Minister of India talk in such a fashion about the sudden and unexplained of one his foremost colleagues in Parliament? But this was Nehru, the autocrat, in other words it meant, that "I arrived at the *clear and honest* conclusion" – in my discretion "I have decided to say no more!" And after *my clear and honest conclusion* all arguments must stop. This was Nehru. Both Gandhi and Patel were dead, and now with Dr. Mookerjee's death, the last person who could question him was gone. He was, at last, the monarch with unquestioned rights, and he could do as he pleased.

Among those leaders who demanded the enquiry were Jayaprakash Narayan, Purshottam Das Tandon, Hari Vishnu Kamath, M.R.Jayakar, Master Tara Singh, Sucheta Kripalani, Pandit Hriday Nath Kunzru, S.S.More and others. Atulya Ghosh, the Congress President of West Bengal and Dr. B.C.Roy also obliquely asked for an enquiry. But Nehru would not budge.

Thus, ended the life of one of the greatest sons of Mother India. But it did not go in vain. The party that Dr. Mookerjee founded, the ideals for nation building that he set before the people and workers ultimately found their realisation and today we have a full majority BJP Government ruling India, inspired and imbued by those great ideals and committed to protecting Bharatiya *maryada* and to work for realising a great and united India.

Sri Guruji Golwalkar, in his tribute to Dr. Mookerjee said, "As a true fighter for his motherland, Dr. Mookerjee died in the forefront of the battle for integration of Kashmir, which is and which ought to be immediately declared an undivided

and indivisible part of Bharat.”

Atal Behari Vajpayee’s tribute to Dr. Mookerjee was a deeply moving one – he said, “I had the privilege of working with Dr. Mookerjee after he became the President of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh. I also accompanied him on his journey to Srinagar from where he was to never return. His last message to the people – “I’ve entered Jammu & Kashmir defying the permit system”, still rings in my ears. He was the first martyr to the cause of India’s unity and integrity.

His towering personality, his debating skills, his political sagacity and above all his humanism will continue to inspire and guide generations to come.”

### Suggested Reading

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- Tathagata Roy, *The Life and Times of Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee*, New Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan, Delhi, 2012. (Also available in Hindi)

*(The above mentioned works have been consulted or cited in this very brief life sketch of Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee)*

## Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee’s Three Historic Interventions that Saved India

Talk by

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It is indeed an occasion of great joy that the Nehru Memorial Library is observing the “*Balidaan Divas*” (*Martyrdom Day*) of Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee. That day, 23<sup>rd</sup> June, has already passed but the memory of his sacrifice is always there in our mind.

To observe the day, an exhibition along with an event, based on the life of Dr. Mookerjee, have been planned today. I am really thankful to the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library from the core of my heart for organising this memorable day.

I am not here in the capacity of the President of the Bharatiya Janata Party. I am driven by my reverence for Dr. Mookerjee, who was the founding President of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh. Today the same Bharatiya Jana Sangh continues to function as

Bharatiya Janata Party.

As the president of BJP I am here to talk about the injustice done by history by not recognizing great deeds and sacrifice of such an eminent and selfless patriot as Dr. Mookerjee. He was a man of high morality, a man of great values and an extraordinary educationist. He was never attached to any post or to any materialistic things. Yet history did not do justice to such a pure soul, one who never hesitated to renounce all power and political at his command, if he felt that renunciation to be the only way forward leading to the betterment of the country and of his countrymen. Dr. Mookerjee always staked everything for the integrity and unity of this country.

My dear friends, I am here to talk about that stalwart Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee, a multifaceted personality. Even if we wish to know about any one side of his personality, it may take hours. It is impossible to describe a man, such as him, with a personality with innumerable dimensions, in just fifteen minutes.

Even if we talk about his determination, his deeds, sacrifices for the country, it will take hours. There are many aspects of his life but I have been given only fifteen minutes, and it will take fifteen minutes for me to discuss a single aspect of his life. However, keeping the schedule of this institution in mind, I will say few things pertaining to all the dimensions of his life and personality.

Dr. Mookerjee was a man of versatile talent.

He became a Barrister at an early age, then Vice-Chancellor and promoted Bengali as a medium of instruction - these are a few of his achievements.

Here, I wish to focus on the three most important aspects for which Dr. Mookerjee will be remembered in future by the people of India. When a selfless person is in the process of performing his duty, he does not know and nor does he care about how history will evaluate his performance, especially personalities like Dr. Mookerjee who had been selfless throughout his life and never cared for his own name and fame.

Dr. Mookerjee's principles and thoughts were beyond any personal ambition. He always thought for his country, lived for his country and finally died for his country. He took decisions, fearlessly in order to solve the contemporary problems of this country. The responsibility, thus, of projecting a real patriot rests with contemporary historians.

These historians must be free from prejudice, biased opinion and free from any thoughts based on caste, creed, religion, party and fundamentalism. Unfortunately, biased historians manipulated the history of this country merely for the sake of their self interest. At first it was torn apart and distorted by Britishers and thereafter by Leftists. Both colonial historians and Marxist historians have distorted Indian history. It is because of such a distortion that Mookerjee could not get his due place in the history of this country, a place which has richly deserved. This denial, I believe, is an unforgivable sin.

The three most important contributions of Dr. Mookerjee which I wish to talk about were the partition of Bengal, the founding of Jana Sangh and the agitation to solve the Kashmir problem. These three are so important interventions that they changed course of the history of our country.

To oppose the Bengal partition there was a major agitation. It is known to very few people that there was an agitation to actually divide Bengal. If that agitation had not had happened, today Kolkata would not have been part of India.

In 1946, when the Labour Party came into power in Britain it was decided that India should be granted independence. In the beginning there was no demand for partition, both Muslim League and the Congress accepted the reality of one India. But with the passage of time circumstances evolved which compelled the division of India. However, the then Congress leadership could have avoided this partition. When India got divided the leadership of the country developed a major principle that whichever state has majority of any community (Hindu or Muslim) it would be included or made part of accordingly of that country. No the country was ever divided based on the idea of religion, but in India partition was accepted on the basis of religion. It was absolutely a hastily taken decision.

In two provinces of the country where the Muslims were in majority but the Hindus too were in good numbers, the kind of atmosphere which was created at that time, it appeared that we would lose

both Bengal and Punjab in their entirety. Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee convened a great conference of Bengali intellectuals and members of the Bengali Hindu intelligentsia and proposed that Bengal be divided on the basis of East and West Bengal. He asked to deliberate on this. His intention was not to let the whole of Bengal to go to Pakistan. In order to do this he called this three day conference and as a result it mobilized public opinion, especially of youth.

The leading daily Amrita Bazar Patrika conducted a survey and the conclusion of the survey was that 98.99 percent people of Bengal wanted a division of Bengal. This decision was accepted and Bengal was divided. Thus Syama Prasad Mookerjee could save a part of Bengal from going to Pakistan.

He met Mountbatten, Gandhiji and many other Congress leaders to present the interests of Hindus before them. It is an outcome of his efforts that Kolkata is part of India and the credit goes to only one person, and it is none other than Syama Prasad Mookerjee. It was he who had successfully kept Bengal united with India.

In that adverse situation many eminent leaders of the Congress were tempted to get the independence as soon as possible so that they could get their desired position before their death. But a very young leader like Dr. Mookerjee thought that one should not make this mistake and lose Bengal. Once again I want to highlight that the credit of keeping Bengal intact with India goes to Syama Prasad Mookerjee.

My dear Friends, when we got freedom it was a matter of concern as to who should be sent to the Constituent Assembly to represent Bengal. Even the leaders from the Congress suggested the name of Dr. Mookerjee. I want to remind you that he was then president of the Hindu Mahasabha and yet was the unanimous choice for the Constituent Assembly.

When government was formed it was a coalition government, a national government and one representative had to be taken from the Hindu Mahasabha. Dr. Mookerjee was given the responsibility of the Industry Ministry, and as Industry Minister he also performed his duty well. Being in the cabinet of Jawaharlal Nehru he worried about the future growth and prospect of the country.

Policies were being framed - foreign policy, economic policy, academic policy, agricultural policy and other important policies were being framed in that cabinet. But Dr. Mookerjee was uncomfortable and unhappy with the process of policy making because he felt that basis of all policies were influenced by western thought. He thought this was a blunder which would mislead our country. He believed that policies of this country should have the flavour of the soil and culture of this county, and must imbibe its Indian-ness in absolute terms. He believed that our philosophy must be reflected in our foreign and external policies and that the economic and agricultural policy of our country must be an example for the rest of the world.

He emphasized that the policies of our country

should have the aroma of our own soil. It should not be imported from the west. When he saw that this was not happening it caused great discomfort to Dr. Mookerjee and almost everyday he had to face this disagreement with Nehru. Dr. Mookerjee said that, "The way our country is being governed I do not see prosperity for the country" in the future. So there was a clear difference between the thoughts of Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee and the thoughts of Pt. Nehru.

Once he was asked as to "what is the difference between the thoughts of the Congress and the Jana Sangh?" He replied in one line that the Congress wants to construct and create a new country with a new thought (*Navnirmaan*) while the Jana Sangh aspired to reconstruct (*Punarnirmaan*) the country inspired by its timeless culture, tradition and values. The Congress assumed that the history of this country would have to be written anew and that there was no use of old values and culture. But Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee and his friends believed that India can be recreated, rebuild on the basis of her culture and values.

Nehru came out with the proposal before the then Prime Minister of Pakistan Liaquat Ali Khan for a solution for the minorities of eastern and western Pakistan. They were subjected to great atrocities in Pakistan; people were coming from East Pakistan to Tripura, Assam and West Bengal as refugees. They were being oppressed in Pakistan. Dr. Mookerjee wanted to raise this issue at a global platform and

expose Pakistan but Pt. Nehru did not pay any attention to that point and signed an agreement with Liakat Ali, thinking that it would solve the problem of minorities once for all.

Dr. Mookerjee was deeply saddened on this agreement and he resigned from the Nehru cabinet.

Having left the cabinet of Pt. Nehru, Dr. Mookerjee travelled extensively across the country and tried to associate likeminded people with him. Having extensively discussed his new vision and proposal with a wide of people cutting across class, caste and religious divides Dr. Mookerjee decided to form a new political party which was named Bharatiya Jana Sangh.

Friends, when Bharatiya Jana Sangh was established in 1951 at Raghomal Kanya Vidyalaya here in Delhi, no one had ever thought and imagined that it was capable of coming to power even in a municipal corporation. Deendayal Upadhyay ji, Atal ji, Jagadish Prasad Mathur ji and our Malhotra ji<sup>2</sup> - all them in their youth then had established the party.

Many youth came forward to form the party, but enjoying power was not their objective at that time. Pt. Nehru and the Congress were at their peak and uttering even a sentence against them was considered to be a crime. Who could have imagined that Jana Sangh would ever come to power, it was considered almost impossible.

Friends, this party was never established with the aim of enjoying power. Dr. Mookerjee had

proposed an alternative politics, ideology and an alternative thinking that would inspire and guide policies and thinking. The hope was to see these policies come to fruition after five, ten, and twenty or fifty years, laying an alternate path to development and growth and also so that the country would know as to what had happened, where we had erred and what should be the next step forward. Jana Sangh was established for this purpose.

A large team was constituted under the leadership of Pt. Deendayal Upadhyaya to formulate a policy, to provide a practical structure for each original idea and finally a single humanitarian approach emerged, the approach of Integral Humanism.

Friends, the country would have suffered a lot had Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee not formed the Jana Sangh. The country cannot run on a single thought, it cannot function after giving up its ideology. This is India and she can never function or survive like those countries which are left without their history, language and culture. Had we not preserved and nurtured the languages of the people, their culture, music and history then we would have never been able to attain a respectable position in the world today and Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee achieved this by forming Jana Sangh.

The Jana Sangh which comprised of ten members at its founding is today the world's largest political party with eleven crore members. I do not want to go into details of Bharatiya Janata Party but

it is essential to mention this in order to explain the life of Syama Prasadji.

Friends, Dr. Mookerjee's third contribution was to provide a different point of view to the Kashmir issue. After independence, when Maharaja Hari Singh was not sure whether Kashmir should go with Pakistan or India, at that time, the Pakistan army launched an attack with the help of tribal raiders and later on Hari Singh merged Kashmir with India. No one knows till date why all of a sudden, without any reason, a ceasefire was declared? No leader would have dared to commit such a historical blunder. Had Nehru not declared the ceasefire, the entire Kashmir would have remained with us. All of a sudden, a ceasefire was declared by Nehru, just to improve his personal image and prestige, due to which a major portion of Kashmir is still with Pakistan. Even after that, various types of rules and regulations were framed. I do not want to go into the details of Article 370 but there was a ruling according to which any person going to Kashmir had to obtain a permit from the Ministry of Defence of the Government of India.

Friends, Syama Prasadji immediately declared that this will not work. He argued that every citizen of India has the right to go to Kashmir without any restrictions and no one can stop them and he took the movement in his own hands.

"There cannot be two heads and two Constitutions in one country", he said. At that time, the Chief Minister of Kashmir was known as the

Prime Minister and the Governor of Kashmir was known as President and to this was added the issue of permit. This was explained in details by the Honourable Governor<sup>3</sup> in his speech today, Dr. Mookerjee resolved to start a Satyagraha against this state of affairs. He went in a passenger train from here [Delhi]. If Syama Prasadji had to be arrested on charges of violating the permit system then he should have been arrested at the Kashmir border itself. If he had to be arrested on account of violating the permit then his custody should have been with the Indian police, but the custody was given to the Kashmir police.

He had been informed that he did not require a permit but he was arrested while crossing the Ravi river bridge saying that his presence in the state can pose law and order problems. He was arrested under this section due to which the custody was given to the Kashmir Police. I do not know why Syama Prasadji was given a waiver for the permit and why was he not arrested at the India-Kashmir border, why did not his custody remain with the Indian Police and after being taken into custody, why was such a tall leader taken from Jammu to Kashmir?

The Honourable Governor has used a very good word when he said that Dr. Mookerjee was kept in the "Safe house." It was nothing of the kind, friends, I have seen that place; I have seen its photograph. It was simply a concrete hut which did not even have proper doors and windows. Syama Prasad Mookerjee was confined to such a congested

place for many days. When his health deteriorated even then an ambulance was not called in. He was taken to the hospital in sitting position in a jeep and there he died under mysterious circumstances.

A very large section of our society feels that Syama Prasad Mookerjee was killed. Had this case been investigated then, the truth could have been made public. It is very unfortunate that the case was not investigated. But I also want to reiterate that the permit system was abolished from Kashmir only due to Syama Prasadji. The Indian flag is being hoisted there and the functionaries are known today as Chief Minister and Governor and not Prime Minister and President. If Kashmir is an integral part of India today and we have so much love for Kashmir, it is only because of the sacrifice of Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee. Kashmir is with us today only due to him.

This “Bengal Tiger” was a multi-dimensional personality. He was associated with Sri Aurobindo, became a successful lawyer after becoming a barrister, he also became President of the Hindu Mahasabha. Mahatma Gandhi, on hearing that he had joined the Hindu Mahasabha had publicly said that after Madan Mohan Malaviya, it is Syama Prasad only for whom Hindus have got such a great respect and that he was capable of leading them. Syama Prasad, in line with his nature, then said that now he would be known as follower of Manu. Gandhiji is then said to have replied, “That you will have to bear with it because no one else can provide true leadership to the Hindus except you”, such was

his credibility, friends.

He did not know what will happen to the permit system after his demise, but just as Jatayu<sup>4</sup> did not know that a powerful demon king, carrying Sita Devi away will kill him with his *Chandrahaas* sword. Although Jatayu was fully aware about the outcome of the battle but still he did not think twice in going ahead and trying to free Sita. Similarly, Syama Prasadji never thought of what would happen to him. He was convinced that these ideas and demands needed be put forth and the movement for Kashmir needed to be launched.

As long we have such leaders, no harm shall ever come to this country. He never cared about allegations from pseudo-secularists. He presented his ideas fearlessly in front of his audiences like a true leader. During those days, the Mahabodhi Society was formed by combining Burma, Sri Lanka and Tibet and Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee was the non-Buddhist President of the Mahabodhi Society. Such a great persona met an untimely death. Had the duo of Syama Prasadji and Deendayalji lived for more years, we could have witnessed many changes in this country long ago, but their thoughts are still providing and inspiring guidance to this country.

A magnificent exhibition has been organized on the life of Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee<sup>5</sup>, the inspiring speech made by him in the Constituent Assembly has also been played, along with the letter written to Pt. Nehru by his mother, his photograph with Gandhiji, his photo as a Vice-Chancellor and

many such valuable documents have also been displayed here.

I feel this exhibition will prove to be an excellent medium to know about Syama Prasadji and enlighten the paths and life of many workers and help them to evolve into fearless personalities.

I once again thank all staff and officers of Nehru Memorial Museum and Library from the core of my heart for organizing such a magnificent programme. ■



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> This an English transcript of the original Presidential Address by Shri Amit Shah on 29<sup>th</sup> June, 2016, delivered on the occasion of the inauguration of the exhibition: “Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee: A Selfless Patriot”, curated by Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee Research Foundation & the Nehru Memorial Museum & Library (NMML), New Delhi on the occasion of Dr. Mookerjee 115<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary.
- <sup>2</sup> Professor Vijay Kumar Malhotra, former Union Minister, former Member of Parliament.
- <sup>3</sup> Professor Tathagata Roy, Governor of the state of Tripura and Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee’s biographer.
- <sup>4</sup> The Eagle with divine powers in the Epic Ramayana, who sacrificed himself in trying to save Sita from the clutches of Ravana.
- <sup>5</sup> Exhibition on Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee titled: Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee: A Selfless Patriot was organised by Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee Research Foundation, in collaboration with the Nehru Memorial Museum & Library (NMML) at Teen Murti House, New Delhi.

