

## *Professor Narmal Agarwala*



1937-2018

*“Teachers are like candles. They consume themselves to brighten the lives of others.”*

Another of the stars has fallen. Another of that generation who took up a job on themselves and made it the focus of their whole life is gone. Professor Narmal Agarwala, a teacher of three generations of teachers, went to tranquil peace on a late January night, leaving behind a legacy of teaching. When I shut my eyes I can visualize his ever smiling face, something that became his trademark over a career of more than 40 years. The sway he had on the lives of students is not a matter of easy comprehension. He was a whiz and a legendary teacher of macroeconomics. He made us feel the pulse of econometrics. He made mathematics an interesting game in the classroom. And generations after generations of students would testify what a magical and incredible teacher he was.

After completing his studies from the erstwhile Presidency College of Kolkata, he started his research under another legendary teacher, Professor Mihir Kanti Rakshit, at the Indian Statistical Institute Kolkata. In 1960, as University of Burdwan was being established in the picturesque garden palace of the Maharajas of Bardhaman, Prof Mihir Kanti Rakshit was called upon to give shape to the Economics department of the fledgling university. A year later, Prof Rakshit inducted Narmal, as he still calls him, into the department as a colleague. Thus began Prof Agarwala's tryst with the Economics department of University of Burdwan, a relation which lasted more than 40 years till he super-annuated from active service.

A teacher lives through his students. Teaching macroeconomics and econometrics was a passion to Prof. Normal Agarwal. He was able to successfully proselytize this passion in his students. Through his deliberation on macroeconomics theory and models, he was successful in creating interest in the subjects he taught among the students. With his devotion and indulgence he would

ignite love for macroeconomics among his students. With his clarity of thought, analytical power, love for teaching and skilful writing, he could have taught anywhere in the world. But he stayed put at his first place of work – tirelessly training students who went out to the world and made a name for themselves, spreading the fame of Prof Agarwala in the process. I believe that a teacher is born, not made, just as a poet is born and not trained. And Prof Agarwala bears testimony to this.

Personally I saw him in three different phases. First, during 1979-81, when we were post-graduate students of Economics at the University of Burdwan, he articulated his teaching of macroeconomics in such a charismatic style that we were really charmed. He started from the very basics in macroeconomics and at the end of the course he took us to a formidable height of the subject. In our time, books on macroeconomics of diverse nature as we see today, were not available. Teaching and learning were mainly based on journal articles. In absence of computers, internet, photocopying, our teachers aptly made us rush to the central library to consult journals. And in those days university libraries did not yet feel the pinch of economic restructuring and were well stocked. We were driven to study seminal papers in macroeconomics, analyse them and link them by Prof Agarwala. He was a hard task master, but worked harder than all his students.

In the second phase, during 1986-2002, Prof Agarwala was my colleague in the Economics department of University of Burdwan. During this time I got frequent opportunities to enlighten myself on different issues through exchange of views and discussion. One thing that was really amazing was his focus of mind. Often while discussing a particular topic we would pose a question before him. Without concentrating enough on the original issue we often raised a second issue, or a third, and so on, and in the process deviated far from the basic issue we had raised in the beginning. But, not that with Prof Agarwala. He would still be applying his mind on the basic issue posed before him and came up with the most appropriate solution. Apparently, he took a lot of time to answer any question or to respond to any particular issue raised before him. But that was only because he would ponder over all possible angles and the far reaching impacts, took time to check and cross-check his answer within himself, like a seasoned chess player. Only when he had been doubly sure that he had accounted for all possible eventualities, he proceeded to answer. As a teacher and as a colleague, he was never perfunctory in his approach.

This contemplative approach that he was known for in the Institution was something he carried in his personal life as well, which I witnessed in the third phase, when, after his retirement from service, he was my neighbour from 2002 till his final departure. I saw him during his active days, enjoying his walk, and during his ailing days. After his wife passed away, he lived alone in Burdwan. He had his own share of problems – physical, personal and social – but I never heard him complaining and the smile lingered in his face. We talked over the telephone, often I went to his house for spending some time discussing and reminiscing, but mostly I preferred to listening to him rather than speaking. He enquired about almost everyone at the Economics department, old and young, his students and many of our common acquaintances, with the inimitable smile on his lips.

Generations of students at Burdwan were fortunate to be taught by such a legendary teacher. We will indeed be missing Prof Agarwala. May his soul rest in peace.

[Maniklal Adhikary]