

An Obituary**Parimal Roy**

INSTEAD of publishing his first X despatch from New York surveying the American economy, which he had offered to do on his own accord. *The Economic Weekly* has the misfortune to publish, instead, the obituary of Parimal Roy, one of the most brilliant and promising of our younger economists. Parimal died from heart attack in New York on October 14 soon after joining the Fiscal Division of the UNO as its First Economic Affairs Officer. The news came as a shock even to his closest friends as Parimal looked quite hale and hearty when he sailed from Bombay with his family in June last to take up his new appointment. No one suspected then that anything so tragic could happen to him. It was only a few days before his death that doctors discovered that Parimal had been suffering from thrombosis of the heart and high blood pressure for a long time which had gone undetected. Being modest to a fault and self-effacing to a degree, Parimal had either taken his illness lightly or kept it all to himself from the fear of bothering others or making a fuss about himself. A brilliant career has been cut short just on the threshold of big things for the Fiscal Division of the United Nations offered much wider scope for the exercise and recognition of his talents than Parimal had found in the Indian Administrative Service Training School at Delhi with its heavy call on his time and energy for routine teaching work.

The lancet or the scalpel rather than the sledge hammer was the proper instrument for him and Parimal was more in his elements in the rarified atmosphere of pure theory than in the dust and heat of the controversies of the market place which have to do so much with brute facts. Not that applied problems repelled him but the high standards he had set for himself made progress difficult particularly when he was bound down by the heavy routine teaching work which falls to the lot of teachers of Indian Universities. To it, he added literary attainments of a high order. For before he took seriously to economics, literature had been his first love and Parimal had established his reputation as a Bengali writer of great promise as an associate of Buddhadeva Bose in editing and running *Pragati*, a literary journal in

Bengali published from Dacca which had created quite a stir in its time and initiated a new movement vital, bold and iconoclastic, whose influence long survived its close.

The best published evidence of Parimal Roy's analytical powers will be found in his paper on "Collective Wants", one of his few contributions to the *Indian Journal of Economics* which drew the attention of eminent British and American economists and was selected by Prof Hicks for reprint in the *Review of Economic Studies*, London. No prolific writer by any means, eager to rush to print—chiselled perfection and quality rather than quantity being his motto—Parimal carried these a little too far. Considering that he published so little, *The Economic Weekly* had indeed been fortunate in getting some outstanding contributions from him, one of the earliest being on "Foreign Capital for India and the World Bank" which appeared in the issue of March 5, 1949, in which he strove hard to drive home the lesson that foreign capital, should India care for it, has to be canvassed on a more realistic basis. That a world smitten by two world wars and one great depression should behave with such economic irresponsibility that ECAFE had achieved nothing and that, on the contrary, its deliberations should reveal an utter lack of imagination and a persistent colonial mentality on the part of the big powers drew his subtle irony. He could not help being amused at the same time that some of us should depend, with admirable naivete, on the moral duty of the advanced economies to help those behind, confident that such morality is today based upon the factual foundation of economic reality. There was a fine but rather slight review of Das Gupta's "War and Post-war Inflation in India" in one of the later issues.

Apart from the handicaps of temperament, what prevented Parimal from writing more often for *The Economic Weekly*, was his official position which demanded that contributions should be first approved by his official superiors before, they could be published. One such draft submitted for approval was left to collect dust for so long on the shelves of his superior that Parimal got quite disgusted and never asked

for such permission again. He found a different outlet. The piece de resistance in this journal surely was his anonymous report on the last Economic Conference held in Aligarh. No one suspected his authorship because few knew the essayist and the practitioner of belles lettres hidden behind the Sober and rather reserved exterior of the professor, though his inside was brimful of humour. This is probably the only piece of his writing in English in which the literary artist in him had joined hands with the economist. For the former, one has to turn to his slender volumes in Bengali, published under the title 'Idaning'.

Polished, urbane and yet acute and analytical, who could stand no humbug nor put up with fools gladly, Parimal seemed to suffer from a lack of atmosphere, the only escape from which was the world of books and friends. His fine sense of humour which could laugh at himself just as gleefully as it could laugh at others shone to perfection in the story he told his friends about his appointment to the Fiscal Division as the First Economic Affairs Officer. This, Parimal said, was due to the accident of his having worked only for a month in a purely honorary capacity as the Economist to the Fiscal Commission. He could not stand the secretariat atmosphere for long and what he said about successful administrators with pretensions to a knowledge of economics is unprintable. But that is only by the way. The 'stigma' stuck to him and the Personnel Division at Lake Success, not knowing that the Fiscal Commission had to advise on protection to industries and had precious little to do with public finances was duly impressed and taken in by it. To make the story sound more creditable, he mentioned the kind warning from a friend in Washington who had thoughtfully asked him to buy a copy of Prof Hicks' book on Swedish anti-cyclical budgetary methods and to study it diligently on board the ship so that he would not be found out when he landed to take up his new job!

Friends and admirers will deeply mourn the loss of such a precious life in its prime. Those who are interested in the development of economic studies in this country will regret as deeply the premature end of a budding talent before it had flowered and been able to give the country of its best.

