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Obituary, Professor Debesh Chakraborty

Kakali Mukhopadhyay

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In May, Professor Debesh Chakraborty passed away after a short illness. He had been a faculty member at the department of Economics, Jadavpur University, Calcutta, India for more than three decades. He obtained his doctoral degree in economics in 1973 from Jadavpur University and began his academic career as a post-doctoral researcher at New York University with Nobel Laureate Prof. W.W. Leontief, a distinction which shaped him into one of the pioneers and forerunners of multi-sector quantitative research in Applied Economics and Input–Output modeling in India. He will be remembered for developing emerging areas of research in Economics of Energy and Environment, International Trade, Economics of Information Technology, Regional Economics, Population and Health Economics, and Economics of SAARC and ASEAN countries with special focus on Application of the Input–Output framework, Global CGE model and Applied Quantitative techniques. He was, without any doubt, one of the most renowned and most thoughtful academicians in the field of Input–Output Economics.

Professor Chakraborty co-authored several books and leaves behind more than a 100 publications in various peer-reviewed journals. His final work was a book titled ‘Water Pollution and Abatement Policy in India—A Study from an Economic Perspective’, however, he did not have the opportunity to see the printed volume. He had contributed extensively to the analysis of multi-sectoral models and was one of the early researchers in that field in India. His works have been widely cited, setting the trend for many young researchers in that field. Analytical rigour, deep knowledge of the diverse subjects of his research and sound economic analysis were the hallmark of any work he undertook. Always on the lookout for research on fundamental and

K. Mukhopadhyay (✉)
McGill University, Montreal, Canada
e-mail: kakali.mukhopadhyay@mcgill.ca

emerging issues, he continued his engagement in supervising Ph.D. students and directed large research projects even after his retirement. Twenty-three scholars earned their doctoral degrees under his supervision in diverse fields in economics.

His involvements as a founding member of the International Input–Output Association over the years have greatly contributed to maintaining a strong interest in Input–Output Analysis in India. In the last couple of years, as Professor Chakraborty spent a fair amount of his time in Canada he developed a deeper understanding of the issues faced by the country and became increasingly interested in Canadian economic policy particularly agriculture, health and trade. He was involved in several important works on the Canadian economy funded by the Shastri-Indo Canadian Institute and other funding agencies in Canada.

He was attached as a fellow or visiting fellow to various universities and institutions such as United Nations ESCAP in Bangkok, New York University in the USA, Tilburg University and MERIT-Maastricht University in the Netherlands, the East–West Center at the University of Hawaii, the Korea Institute of Population and Family Planning in South Korea, the University of Newcastle in the UK, Oulu University in Finland, and the Department of Agricultural Economics, McGill University, Canada.

He possessed the rare personality that could blend academics with the real issues of our daily life to develop a vision for societal progress at large. A keen observer with a sharp intellect and empathy for the common man, he befriended people from all walks of life. Above all, he was a wonderful human being who always gave his best to his students, friends, and colleagues. I will forever remember a man with such deep commitment to academics and society and love for equality and balance. It is hard to believe that such a vigorous human presence is no more. He will be greatly missed.

With great sadness,

Kakali Mukhopadhyay