

Classic Poetry Series

Prithwindra Mukherjee

- poems -

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Prithwindra Mukherjee(1936 -)

Prithwindra Mukherjee retired in 2003 from a career as a researcher in the Human and Social Sciences Department (Ethnomusicology) of the French National Centre of Scientific Research in Paris. He is the author of a number of books and other publications on various subjects.

 Early Life

Prithwindra was born in Kolkata, India, in 1936, and educated at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram School (at present, the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education) in Pondicherry. He is the grandson of the Bengali revolutionary Jatindranath Mukherjee (Bagha Jatin).

Professional and Academic Life

Prithwindra began his working life as a teacher of Bengali, French and English languages and literature in Pondicherry. He was mentioned by the Sahitya Akademi (New Delhi) manuals and anthologies as a poet before he attained the age of 20. As a specialist in the French language and literature, he translated works by such French authors as Albert Camus, Saint-John Perse, and René Char directly from their originals.

He moved to Paris with a French Government Scholarship (1966–70). He prepared and defended a thesis on Sri Aurobindo at Sorbonne. Later he served as a lecturer on Indian civilisation and philosophy, producer of several radio features on Indian culture and music for Radio France, and he was also free-lancing as a journalist for the Indian and French press. His next thesis for Doctorat d'Etat (PhD), was supervised by Raymond Aron in University Paris IV, on the pre-Gandhian phase of India's freedom fight. His thesis discussed this movement from 1893 to 1918 and its spiritual roots.

In 1977, invited by the National Archives of India as a guest of the Historical Records Commission, he presented a paper on Jatindra Nath Mukherjee and the Indo-German Conspiracy in the presence of personalities like Arthur L. Basham and Professor S. Nurul Hasan. Prithwindra's original contribution in this area has been recognised by Professor Amales Tripathi, Bhupendrakumar Datta, Dr Jadugopal Mukhopadhyay, Dr. M.N. Das (Utkal University), Professor A.C. Bose, Samaren Roy, Bhupati Majumdar, Basudha Chakravarty. Quite a few of his papers on the subject have been translated into major Indian languages.

Since his reaching Paris, for a number of years, invited by the literary magazine *Desh of Calcutta* he published his impressions of Paris life (*Paris'ér chithi - Letters from Paris*), as well as several cover features including Jatin Mukherjee alias Bagha Jatin, M.N. Roy, Tarak Nath Das, Dhan Gopal Mukerji, French Revolutionary and the Bengali intelligentsia and the poetry-cum-dance genre of the *kîrtana* (on which he has also produced a documentary film).

He went to USA as a Fulbright scholar and discovered, especially in the Wilson Papers, scores of files covering the Indian revolutionaries. On returning to France in 1981, he joined French National Centre of Scientific Research in 1981. He was also a founder-member of the French Literary Translators' Association. He retired from there a few years back. He has published as much in Bengali as in French. One of his recent contributions is a documentary film on the musical pillars in the temples of South India (CNRS-Audiovisual, Paris).

Since 1981, Prithwindra Mukherjee joined the LACITO of the CNRS (Department of Ethnomusicology) working on a comprehensive cognitive study of scales of North and South Indian music.

The eminent author Jacques Attali in his French biography of Gandhi (Fayard, 2007) mentions his debt to PM for having revised the manuscripts and collaborated actively. Later Mr Attali has qualified Prithwindra Mukherjee as "the man of Franco-Indian Renaissance".

On 1 January 2009, the Minister of Culture of France has appointed Prithwindra Mukherjee to the rank of chevalier (Knight) of the Order of Arts and Letters.

The Emperor Tree

Wherever I be, in Paris, Pamplona or Prague,
My awareness moves about with the Emperor of Trees,
Overweighed, ever-green in shadowy Aprilling leaves
Sheltering the timeless sleep of a Godly love.

Motherer of myriad planets and milky ways,
She who had assumed that body of radiating Grace
To meet upon earth, as a mortal wooing her Prince,
The consuming fire of terrestrial transformation...

Fire, indeed, though lotus were his eyes,
Capable of snatching from the nethermost Inconscient's core
The stolen secrets of the solar diamond rays,
Causing a nuclear firework of Consciousness.

He had been steering for inward oceans where Heaven was not...
On a Honey-Moon, down the vortex of Oblivion,
They set a-blaze the Memory's metamorphosed sky
And mirror in Hades the steel blue lakes where Goddesses revel.

Wherever I be, in Lausanne, or Morangis or Naples,
Beside Alpine summits or in supernal Azure caverns,
Schizophrenic, transplanting the Emperor of Trees
I shelter the timeless sleep of my Godly Love...

Prithwindra Mukherjee