

# Kumar Babu

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I was participating in a Seminar in Calcutta. While referring to aesthetic responses to music, I referred to Rabindranath's correspondence with late Dhurjatiprasad Mukherji and the interesting and provoking opinions pithily exchanged therein! Suddenly, I noticed that the Bengali members in the audience began craning their necks to look intently at a portly gentleman with mild looks, sitting in the front row! He was also smilingly nodding back to some of them!

The session was over and the gentleman introduced himself "I am Kumar Mukherji, son of Dhurjatiprasad." and I could not help laughing at the coincidence! I said, "I thought they were doubtful about the veracity of my understanding of what your father said!" He assured me that I was correct and then added with a twinkle in his eyes, "Not many Bengali-s read him now!" I told him how I had enjoyed reading his articles in Desh and how it becomes easier now to connect his wide-ranging acquaintance with the Indian musical scene. I also remembered to have heard him in Mumbai in a house-concert.

Then we dispersed. Again, after a while he sought me, took me aside and calmly said "You know - the doctors have given me six months and I want to finish my book in English. Themes are nearly the same as in my articles in Bengali!" I was dumbfounded, and did not know how to respond! Before I could think of some helpless, sympathetic words, he added, "I would very much like if you can come to my house this evening to discuss some problems I have about the issues I have raised. Especially regarding the declining standards and the changing tastes of the audience". Of course, there was no question of refusing his invitation!

I went to his unassumingly sophisticated home. He gave me a chapter of the proposed book to glance through, and then we discussed the issues raised therein. He was clear, simple and yet firm in his arguments. His wide reading came through as also his habit of coming up with an anecdote related to his point. I jokingly remarked on this feature of his style and, rather seriously he said, "You know - I have not read on music very methodically". I assured him that fortunately his musicians' stories did not replace

the logic of his arguments and hence they merely confirmed the Indian oral tradition that ensures accessibility through anecdotes!

We talked and talked. I marvelled at his level tone - there was no trace of self-pity in whatever he said - only a sense of urgency lurked behind! When I was about to leave, he said "I wish for two things - Wish more people get interested in ideas than building images; and secondly I wish I had turned to writing on music earlier than I did - I waited till I retired and now there isn't much time!" I could not have agreed more!

Was he able to complete his book? I do not know. He certainly belonged to the tribe of mild heroes!

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