

Ashish Bose, You Cannot Pass Away

■ Dr. M.N.Buch

On 7th April 2014, at the age of 84, Ashish Bose passed on to greener pastures. The void he has left behind cannot be filled, because of all the academicians I have known Ashish was a true polymath. There was no subject ranging from pure science to soothsaying in which he was not interested. He and I always bickered over his knowledge of palmistry and astrology, with him as the believer and I as the total non believer and iconoclast. In fact I always called him the world's best demographer and worst soothsayer.

It is almost a cliché to say that Ashish Bose was a demographer of note, because he was a demographic genius, a magician. For example, he coined the phrase decimal point demography. What he meant was that a fractional statistical change meant nothing unless one looked behind it at the absolute numbers it represented. Ashish was a master of statistics, but statistics was not the weapon he used to support an argument. He also looked at the total numbers involved. He looked at real people, not at decimal points, to press a point.

Few people know that Ashish made his greatest contribution as Member, National Commission on Urbanisation, of which I was Vice Chairman. Ashish was not overawed by numbers and he was able to convince the Commission that India is a country where, unlike any other country, there is a settlement pattern in equilibrium in which from village to large metropolis every settlement has a place and there is no primate city. He identified 439 towns, of which only four are large cities, which had a growth potential and could impact an identifiable hinterland. He called them GEM, or generators of economic momentum. They are distributed over 49 urbanisation zones, which are equitably distributed around the country. From this evolved the Commission's major recommendation that we shed our mega-metropolitan syndrome and move towards a well distributed urbanisation that would make rural India grow in tandem with urban India. JNNURM is a direct result of what Ashish Bose advocated in 1985-1987.

Ashish lived life larger than life. He was a **raconteur** who enthralled, a **bon vivant** who was **epicurean** without being a **dilettante**, a **guru** who held his students and audience **spell bound**, a **friend to be cherished**, a good, honest, fearless human being. The world will miss Ashish, but for me, whereas his body has left us, his memory will always be as fresh as if we were sitting across each other, exchanging outrageous views and having delightful debates over them. **Heaven is lucky to have you Ashish, for earth's loss is Heaven's gain.**
