

# Muchkund Dubey

## Warrior of the Global South

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With the sad demise of Muchkund Dubey on 26 June 2024, the world has lost a great warrior for the global South and India has lost a true practitioner of economic diplomacy. Apart from being in the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) and associated with the shaping of various policy initiatives, Dubey also emerged as an erudite scholar, academician, and connoisseur of art and culture at the grassroots level. At one end, he produced an extremely insightful book, *India's Foreign Policy: Coping with the Changing World* (updated in 2016). At another, he came out with a book on Lalan Shah Fakir, a Sufi saint of Bangladesh, in 2017. This bandwidth was possible owing to the milieu within which his intellectual inquisitiveness was shaped, and also due to the multiple facets of the world that he had been exposed to with his modest beginning in the IFS. His ideas of India's foreign relations were couched in his commitment to an inclusive development strategy based on the need for a developmental space for the global South. His passionate speeches across the United Nations and other international platforms showed his uncompromising positions that could help the global South to prevail on multiple occasions.

### Economic Diplomacy

Dubey advanced the idea of economic diplomacy not only through institutional arrangements but also got closely engaged in shaping the philosophy, work programme, and regional and national linkages of those institutions. He worked closely with eminent world economists for the promotion of the new international economic order.

Dubey emphatically argued for ensuring the autonomy of decision-making for the global South. With the launch of the United Nations Trade and Development and regional platforms like the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation

(SAARC), the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation and others, Dubey believed in the global South having its own space for decision-making, selection of instrumentalities and possible choices for advancement of the national interests of its members. He resented the global inequalities in access to resources and the perpetual dependence of the global South on the extractive designs of the developed countries.

Even after his superannuation, he further evolved his commitment, particularly to provide inputs and leadership on the process of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade transition to the World Trade Organization along with B L Das, S P Shukla, B K Keayla, Deepak Nayyar, Biswajit Dhar, and many others. Dubey will always be remembered for his ideas of economic development and the role that diplomacy may play in this regard. He always saw a possibility of convergence, complementarity, and scope for leveraging the plurality of the global South for collective advancement.

Regional and subregional cooperation for advancing India's economic development was a major instrument that Dubey always emphasised upon. With link-minded economists from South Asia, he consolidated the idea of a South Asian identity; to that end, he contributed vigorously not only at the official level as a diplomat but also engaged himself with intellectual and theoretical underpinnings required for the articulation and explanation of regional complementarities in trade, investment, technology, and finance.

Dubey articulated his views on the important role played by foreign policy in his book, *India's Foreign Policy*, writing that foreign policy serves a country's interest by contributing to its economic and social progress. This has made foreign policy increasingly development-oriented. He underscored that until the mid-1980s,

before the onset of the current phase of globalisation, India's foreign policy mainly involved facilitating the flow of foreign development assistance, enhanced access to foreign markets, and securing the transfer of appropriate technologies. It also involved working together with other nations to bring about a change in the international economic environment in order to make it supportive of development. This called for taking initiatives for changing regimes, rules and regulations of the international economic system and putting in place new ones to provide adequate elbow room to developing countries to pursue their development policies. Thus, it is an obvious inference that there is a continuous need on the part of developing countries to hold regular consultations and coordinate their positions at the highest level on global issues for promoting economic and technical cooperation among developing countries.

As already mentioned, Dubey tirelessly worked in a mission mode for a distinct South Asian identity by strengthening socio-economic cooperation among all countries in the region, particularly since the emergence of SAARC. In order to work for the continuous well-being of South Asia, the South Asia Centre for Policy Studies was established. Dubey was its co-founder.

### Faith in the Global South

Dubey used to underline that the beginning of the South-South cooperation traces back to the Asian Relations Conference of March 1947, the Bandung Conference of 1955, and the Non-alignment Movement. The main theoretical underpinning of South-South cooperation reflected in the declarations of these conferences focused on the course of development per se and how they would contribute to the development of the countries concerned. Collective self-reliance was designed to enable the global South to emerge as a force in the world. The aim was to acquire and enhance the bargaining position of the global South in its negotiations with the global North on developmental issues.

Dubey, while speaking at different sessions of the Delhi Process on South-South Cooperation organised by Research

and Information System for Developing Countries, said that the world economic order after World War II has been characterised by a dichotomy between North–South and South–South approaches to cooperation. The North–South component dominated the global economic cooperation agenda often to the detriment of the global South. The South–South cooperation came into being in the early 1960s; and the most important role for its establishment was played by the Non-aligned Movement. The South–South cooperation has gained a fresh momentum. In the current dispensation, the southern countries are playing encouraging roles in the global economic order.

The countries of global South have acquired great economic strength since the 1990s, mainly from the beginning of the century as they have much larger and vast resources. This is a clear indication of what these countries can do for cooperation among themselves and this is reflected on the ground in the outward flow of capital from these countries and engagements in a variety of areas. Globalisation has played a vital and positive role in this regard. It has brought developing countries together by breaking their physical barriers. It has also facilitated cooperation in the field of services on a large scale. There is an economic shift of power balance from the West to the East, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. The data indicates a shift in power balance, creating tremendous opportunities of cooperation among the developing countries, particularly their cooperation with countries of other continents, Latin America and Africa.

### Fighting for a Developmental Space

The idea of the centre and the periphery provided the necessary basis for explaining the causes of underdevelopment in the global South. Contributions of the Argentinean economist Raúl Prebisch facilitated conceptualising the theory of dependency and the resulting policy options for the southern countries to opt for import substitution strategies for industrialisation and achieving a higher degree of self-reliance. The theoretical framework elaborated the idea of peripheral

capitalism, which also shaped the agenda for the Bandung Conference (1955). The argument was basically focusing on terms of trade that were against the exporters of primary commodities vis-à-vis the importers who were then exporting back finished products using the technological advantage. The final draft outcome document of BAPA+40 (40th anniversary of the Buenos Aires Plan of Action for Promoting and Implementing Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries) released on 6 March 2019 and its emphasis on linking South–South cooperation with the 2030 Agenda that would leave no one behind also carries the spirit of Prebisch's call to establish an inclusive global order, which does away with the distinction between the centre and the periphery.

It is in this way that international cooperation within the global South re-motivated several national governments and other actors for country-specific strategies. Several countries initiated their own programmes to move towards self-reliance. In Tanzania, the Arusha Declaration (Swahili: *Azimio la Arusha*) brought forward the Tanganyika African National Union's Policy on Socialism and Self-Reliance (1967) as one of the most prominent documents from Tanzania. However, in the recent past, other strategies have

evolved and the proposal of the African Continental Free Trade Area discusses self-reliance more in the context of trade cooperation and local linkages, through value chains, as the inflow of additional resources has not improved. In the last 10 years, development assistance on average has remained at 2.3% to 2.8% of the gross national income.

In the context of what has been stated, it is obvious that Dubey did not want diplomacy to be confined to dealing with geopolitical and geostrategic issues only; rather, its aims went beyond these notions. In the present era of globalisation and economic interdependence for mutual benefit, economic diplomacy rather than political diplomacy is the order of the day. Diplomacy today has to play a major role in contributing to promoting economic relations at the bilateral, regional, and global levels. Dubey supported the primary aims of economic diplomacy in India's integration into the global economy. There is a need for embracing new approaches at the global level under the rubric of solidarity, which requires greater emphasis on the role of the global South as championed by Dubey.

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