

ONLY A FEW INDIVIDUALS leave an expansive and enduring legacy like Dr Bibek Debroy's. Some will remember him as a Padma Shri recipient, an exceptional columnist, and an economist who shared a deep knowledge of classical Sanskrit and ancient texts. For others, those of us who had the privilege of learning from him, Bibek da was not just a chairman or an advisor; he was a true guru, a guiding light. Reflecting on my guru's extraordinary contributions to India's growth and cultural landscape, I feel profound grief in his absence—a

weight I will carry forever. Along with this grief, I will hold onto his insights and inspiring call to action, urging us to envision a better future for India's growth and development.

As an economist, he played a key role in shaping current policy dynamics, having served as the Chairman of the Economic Advisory Council of the Prime Minister's Office from 2017 until his passing. His words invoked wisdom in those he interacted with, and he shared his profound perspectives with everyone he met, especially the young minds who were always motivated by his words. His economic insights transcended India's growth and development trajectory, a theme he consistently emphasised by highlighting the crucial role of state governments in driving progress. He believed a focused approach at the state level was indispensable for effectively addressing developmental challenges and seizing India's path towards a developed economy.

This is reflected in his contributions as a critical steering committee member for India's Competitiveness Roadmap, where he highlighted that true economic competitiveness arises from individual businesses and the broader institutional framework shaped by government policies. For him, real progress required reforms and a deep understanding of India's diverse regional dynamics. His vision was clear: to enhance India's growth trajectory, we must improve productivity across all sectors while recognizing each state's unique advantages. He argued that states should focus on creating an enabling environment rather than supporting specific firms with policy instruments like subsidies to boost the competitiveness of certain industries. Dr Debroy often discussed how such approaches need to change with modern competition. Therefore, each state needs to identify its strengths and foster the right conditions to enhance productivity.

While his economic insights shaped public policy discourse over the decades, his intellectual legacy extended into realms of harboured passion, which he pursued to enrich India's cultural heritage. His unwavering commitment was translating the complete *Mahabharata* into ten volumes, followed by the three-volume translation of the *Valmiki Ramayana* for Penguin Classics. He approached these ancient texts with scholarly rigour and a

storyteller's touch, carefully preserving their philosophical depth while making them approachable to young readers. This speaks of his deep commitment to making our ancient wisdom accessible to contemporary readers, and his work is a testament to the richness of our cultural heritage.

Throughout my long collaboration with Bibek da, we have frequently engaged in meaningful discussions about the urgent need to create liveable and inclusive cities. Our dialogues on urbanisation have been significant learning experiences, highlighting his vision for social improvement and a better quality of life in India. I have always been aware of his unwavering dedication to developing vibrant urban environments that enhance the lives of all residents. In the foreword to my book, *The Age of Awakening*, and

A MIND BEYOND MEASURE— CELEBRATING BIBEK DA'S LEGACY

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Bibek Debroy (25 January, 1955 - 1 November, 2024)
His opinion pieces have appeared periodically
in *BW Businessworld*

Photography by Ritesh Sharma

the *India Competitiveness Roadmap for 2047*, he frequently referenced the motto “*Citius, Altius, Fortius.*” This emphasis highlighted the importance of progress on our national journey. His commitment to this principle was evident in his belief that while we must strive for excellence, attaining that excellence requires continuous effort and strategic actions at critical moments.

My last collaboration with him was the book *Jyotirlingam*, published by Penguin in September 2024. Though we never had the chance to launch this work formally, the journey we shared –

exchanging our ideas about Shiva and exploring our personal experiences and understanding of spirituality – was life-changing for me. His wisdom and passion for the subject illuminated our path together in co-authoring this book.

Bibek da, losing you has not only been a personal loss for me, but I’ve also lost my guru – a remarkable guiding light who inspired us all intellectually and touched our hearts and minds. For everyone who had the honour of working alongside him, Bibek da’s departure is not just a farewell; it is a poignant reminder that true impact is measured by the love and respect that

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continue to endure even after someone has left us.

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Much like Shiva, who embodies the cycle of destruction and renewal, your spirit, thoughts, and ideas will continue illuminating my understanding, guiding me toward a deeper sense of clarity and liberation. Until we meet again, I will share the wisdom you’ve generously shared as your spirit is alive. I will carry forward your teachings and strive to honour your memory through my journey of pursuits and services. *Om Namah Shivay.* **BW**

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