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On the academic making of Dr. Narmadeshwar Jha

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Abstract. Narmadeshwar Jha was an economist in India who specialized on the economics of Alfred Marshall. Jha passed his MA from Patna University and did his Ph.D. in the University of Leeds, UK. He wrote his well-known book titled “The Age of Marshall: Aspects of British Economic Thought, 1890-1915”. This paper makes an attempt to investigate the academic influences on Jha making him what he was.

Keywords. Narmadeshwar Jha, Bhagalpur University, Alfred Marshall, University of Leeds, A.J. Brown.

JEL. A23, B13, B31, B41.

1. Introduction

Professor Narmadeshwar Jha, who was the Vice Chancellor of Bihar University in the early 1980s and the Head of the Department of Economics, Bhagalpur University before assuming the said vice chancellorship, was teaching in the Department of Economics, Bhagalpur University, Bihar (India) during 1960s and 1970s. He did his MA from Patna University and PhD from the University of Leeds, UK. He had a treasure of knowledge on Alfred Marshall and the economic thought that evolved in the age of Marshall. His book (Jha, 1963; 1973) is a partial record of his scholarship on the Marshallian economics and its follow up.

2. Early education and academic influences

Professor Jha was born on January 1st 1923 in Maheshpur, a village in the Godda district of erstwhile Bihar, now Jharkhand, India. I do not have any information about his school days. However, in the years of his formation as an economist, Jha was a student of the Department of Economics in Patna College (which in the early 1950s was converted into the University Department of Economics of Patna University). From Patna College, Jha passed his BA examination with Honours in 1942 and MA examination in 1946 and specialized in Indian Finance (as mentioned in the certificate given to him by Gyan Chand, see Carter, 2018: Trinity 2.0 arrangement D3/12/60:4). At this juncture it may be noted that while Jha passed BA in 1942, he took four years to pass MA (only 2-years' course) in 1946. A possible explanation is the turmoil during the Quit India Movement (August 1942 to the first quarter of 1944) which was started from Patna. It is well known that in the morning of 11th August 1942, a large number of students arrived at the gates of the then Patna Secretariat, who did not attack the police or indulge in vandalism, but only insisted on hoisting the Congress flag on the Secretariat building and, thus, supposedly hurt the prestige of the British Empire. In an attempt to hoist the flag, the flag bearers, one by one, fell down to the British bullets; one to be followed by another to take his place. By the time the firing stopped, there were 7 dead, and 14 wounded. Almost all the seven martyrs were teen-agers studying in

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class XI or X; only one of them was in college. This incidence led to total disruption of education programs in Bihar, only to be resumed in 1944. However, this explanation of the delay in doing MA by Jha requires further research.

Economists like Gyan Chand, Gorakhnath Sinha and Ram Bihari Singh taught in Patna College and it is most likely that Jha was influenced by his teachers, especially by their career as economists as well as their personal achievements. It is needed, therefore, that we should know something about his teachers in the Patna College.

Professor Gyan Chand (1893-1983) was born on June 20, 1893 in Baluchistan and had his early education in Lahore. He had earned his Doctoral degrees (in the field of Fiscal Policies) from the London School of Economics in 1932 (Scot, 2011). During 1926-1930 he taught in Banaras Hindu University. During 1931-1946 he was the head of department of economics in Patna College (Anonymous, 1983). Gyan Chand, since 1926, wrote profusely on various topics relating to the Indian economy covering Indian finance, fiscal reconstruction, population problem, land economics, rural economics, public corporations and economic development (Gyan, 1926, 1930, 1931, 1939, 1944, 1945a, 1945b, 1946a, 1946b, 1956a, 1956b, 1958, 1965, 1967, 1972).

Professor Gorakh Nath Sinha (1897-1966) was born on 18th October 1897 in Saran District of Bihar. He Passed Entrance Exam in 1915 from Chappra Zila School. He completed his BA from Patna College in 1919 with distinction in Economics. He did his MA (Economics) in 1923 from the same college, with a grand result breaking the record of Patna University. He received scholarship in 1924 for higher studies in the University of Cambridge. Immediately after completing his studies in Cambridge he was appointed in 1927 as Assistant Professor of Economics in Ravenshaw College, Cuttack. In 1931, he became professor of Economics at Patna college and after a sojourn of about seven years (1934-1941, while he was Inspector of schools for four years and Deputy Director of Education until 1941) he returned to Patna college as head of department of Economics to become the Principal of Patna college in 1946 ([Retrieved from]). These records suggest that Jha, while doing his MA, was a student of Goarakhnath Sinha.

Ram Bihari Singh (1915-2003) was born in Saran District and he did his MA and PhD from Patna College. He started his academic career as lecturer of economics in TNJ College (now TNB College), Bhagalpur. Soon he left TNJ College to join the Bihar Education Service and was posted as an Assistant Professor of Economics in Patna College, where he worked with Gyan Chand, Gorakhnath Sinha, etc. Professor Ram Bihari Singh did his PhD from Patna University on industrial labour in Bihar. He remained in Patna College almost for a decade until he was transferred from Patna College to GBB College (later renamed as L.S. College, Muzaffarpur) in 1952.

It may be noted that Prof. R.B. Singh was transferred from Patna College to GBB College who started the Post Graduate Department there. After doing his MA in 1946, Jha joined the GBB College, Muzaffarpur and taught Undergraduate as well Postgraduate classes until 1953 when he got an opportunity to study abroad (UK). Shri H. Lal of the LS College recommended him for London School of economics (Carter, 2018; Trinity 2.0 arrangement D3/12/60:4). Transfer of Prof. R.B. Singh to L.S. College could have been due to the fact that he was a Ph.D. from Patna University and further that he was not producing books or research papers so frequently. The Department of Economics in Patna College at that time was dominated by those teachers who had an exposure to education abroad (e.g. Gyan Chand was associated with the London School of Economics; Gorakhnath Sinha was associated with Cambridge). Dr. B. R. Mishra, M.A., Ph.D. D.Sc. (London), was heading the Department of Applied Economics and Commerce since 1942.

In retrospect we note that, in their research domain, the teachers of Narmadeshwar Jha were applied economists grappling with the problems of the

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Indian economy. Professor Gorakhnath Sinha conducted the well known Food Survey of Bihar in 1946-47, which was first ever attempt in India in this direction, aimed at finding out the basic position regarding food economics of this state. Later on, he wrote his book (Sinha, 1956) on the theme of food problem in India. He was also interested in the political economy of war and peace (Sinha, 1956; 1962). Professor Gyan Chand was interested in financial system of India including federal and local finance (Gyan, 1926; 1930; 1931; 1944), agricultural economics and land-based rural economics (Gyan Chand, 1946a), population problem of India (Gyan, 1939; 1945; 1972), economics of development (1946b, 1967), issues in planning and comparative study of economic systems (Gyan Chand, 1956a and 1956b). He was a scholar who wrote a lot. Hajela (1967) provides an excellent summary of the works of Professor Gyan Chand. It is likely that Professor Ram Bihari Singh might have influenced Jha through the methodology that Professor Singh used in his research work 'Industrial Labour in Bihar, 1921-48', which had close relationship with the research work of Sydney and Beatrice Webb. However, it is only a speculation and requires some research work for its substantiation.

In the L.S. College, Muzaffarpur, Jha was also teaching economic thought to the MA students (Carter, 2018; Archive D3/12/60:4). It appears, therefore, that his leaning to do research work on Alfred Marshall might have found its origin in his own studies that he did for teaching economic thought to his MA students. In his own MA program he studied the history of economic thought and was exposed to the economists and their work. It is likely that his teachers some of who were educated in Cambridge, and the London school of economics might have expressly motivated him to do his PhD in England. Prof. H. Lal of Patna University recommended him to do his PhD in the London School of Economics (Carter, 2018; Archive D3/12/60:4).

3. Professor Narmadeshwar Jha in the UK

I do not have much information as to the year in which Professor Jha landed in the UK for his higher studies. But as it is partly suggested by the available documents (Carter, 2018; Archive D3/12/60:4), he was granted in 1953 a scholarship to study abroad and he was recommended for admission to the London School of Economics. In London he also met Pierro Sraffa.

Among the correspondence papers of Sir Dennis H. Robertson with Professor Jha (see Janus, a self-funded project, established in October 2002 to provide a single point of networked access to catalogues of archives and manuscript collections held throughout Cambridge) we find (Mishra, 2008) three documents dated back to the period 1953-60. Those documents relate to the research work of professor Jha. In another letter, dated June 24th 1957, Professor Jha acknowledges his indebtedness to Professor Robertson and thanks him for help on his thesis. From these pieces of information it appears that Jha came to the UK in 1953 and completed his doctoral work in 1957. Through his letter, dated March 4th 1963, Professor Jha requested Professor Robertson to write a foreword to his book "The Age of Marshall: Aspects of British Economic Thought, 1890-1915" to be published. Sir Dennis H. Robertson in appreciation of the work of Professor Jha (Foreword: The Age of Marshall, p. xiii) wrote: "Dr. Jha has, in my view, deserved well of students of Economics, not only in India but elsewhere, by the patient thoroughness with which he has worked through twenty-five solid volumes of the Economic Journal, and the discerning and temperate judgment with which he has sought to present an ordered account of what he has found there. Of course the range of his scholarship extends far beyond the bounds of the Journal. ... it is also among his purposes to show in what manner what was thought and written in 1891-1915 differed from what had been thought and written earlier, and how far it foreshadowed what was to be thought and written in later years." These evidences suggest that Professor Jha was connected to Professor Robertson (by letter writing and maybe personal visit) and have had very good rapport with him. It is likely that Professor Jha completed his PhD thesis (titled 'The Economic Journal and Aspects

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of British Economic Thought, 1890-1915' supervised by Professors A.J. Brown and L.G. Johnson at the University of Leeds, U.K. in 1957, later on published as a book in 1963), and hence the letter to Professor DH Robertson, thanking the latter for his help in appreciating certain aspects of neo-classical economics and many of the chapters of this book at various stages of its evolution. Professor Jha also acknowledged the debt of Professor J.R. Hicks and Mrs. Ursula Hicks of Oxford, Dr. A.E.C. Hare and Dr. B.R. Wilson of the University of Leeds, and Dr. F.H. Awad of Caro University (Jha, 1963).

However, the academic family tree joins Prof. Jha with other economists only through his supervisor, Prof. A.J. Brown (who was a doctoral student of Prof. Jacob Marschak). Through Marschak he was connected to Alfred Weber and Emil Lederer and the academic ancestors G. von Schmoller, E.B. von Bawerk, L.J. Brentano and T.G. Masaryk (Fig.1).

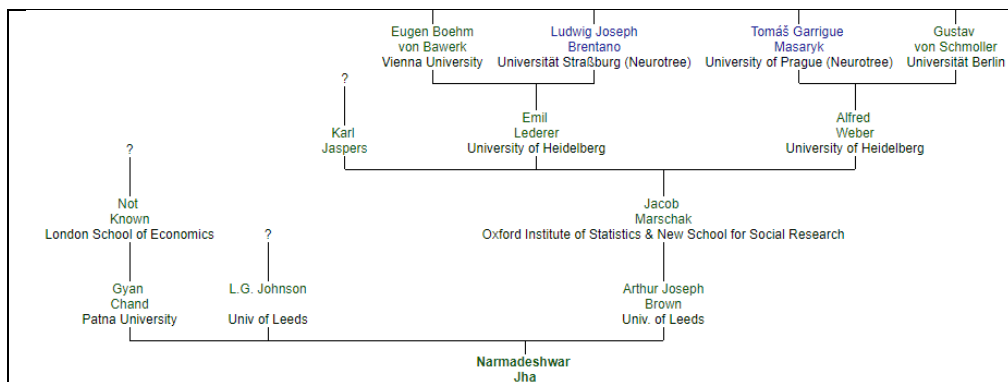


Figure 1.

Academic Family Tree of Professor Narmadeshwar Jha

It may be noted that G. Von Schmoller was one of the leading figures in the Historical School of Economics that flourished in Germany. On the other hand, E.B. von Bawerk was an economist belonging to the Austrian school of thought, well known for criticising Marx, through studying the economic movements and the resulting economic thoughts by the historical method. Bawerk (1884) is an exhaustive study of the alternative treatments of interest indicating to remuneration theories, productivity theories, abstinence theories, exploitation theories, incentive to investment (colorless) theories, and so on. What is common among them, however, that Bawerk and Schmoller both looked into history (phenomenology) of events, and ideas, for their evolution. Alfred Weber was an economist, as well as geographer, sociologist and theoretician of culture. He is so well-known that I should not delve on him. In some sense, Bryan R. Wilson (who was a contemporary to Jha at Leeds and is acknowledged by the latter) may be connected to Weber. Wilson was from Leeds. He spent his undergraduate years at University College, Leicester. He did his doctoral research under the supervision of Donald MacRae at the London School of Economics, where he was awarded his PhD in 1955 for his thesis titled 'Social aspects of religious sects: A study of some contemporary groups in Great Britain with special reference to a Midland city.' Emil Lederer was a democratic socialist economist and his efforts as a democratic socialist are reflected by his range of topics, including the theory of economy and class structure analysis.

It may be interesting to mention here that Professor Jha have had a democratic socialist leaning (and not the Marxist socialist leaning). This I know through my personal contact with Professor Jha since I was his student. It would also be of equal interest to know that in the years of the academic upbringing of Jha, the modern version of Indian economics (that took roots and form after India's independence) was non-existent. Indian economists were in those times deeply and greatly influenced by the thinking of Professor Dada Bhai Nauroji, Romesh

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Chander Dutt, etc. who argued that the British imperialism was the root cause of the misery of India. They held that the British policy had de-industrialized India in the British interest and severely damaged employment and livelihood of millions of people. Dutt (1908) held that, as a consequence of deindustrialization, there was an increased dependence upon agriculture, which also came under severe pressures with British rule, chiefly because of the high level of taxation (Parthasarathi, 2001; Bagchi, 1976, 1982). Besides, Nauroji (1902) had propounded his drain theory and held the British responsible for poverty in India. Nauroji and Dutt were also in favour of developing the Indian School of Economics (or Indian Economics) akin to the Historical/Nationalist school of thought developed in Germany on the lines Georg Friedrich List. Therefore, it was natural that the German thoughts influenced the Indian students of economics. We find on Institut für Asien- und Afrikawissenschaften website the information that roughly fifty Indian students received a doctorate in a range of disciplines from the Berlin university, Germany during the first half of the 20th century. Ram Manohar Lohia (who emerged as a great socialist leader in India after he returned from Berlin) studied national economy as his major subject under the professors Hermann Schumacher, Ludwig Bernhard and Werner Sombart. He submitted his doctoral research under the title *Die Besteuerung des Salzes in Indien* (Salt Taxation in India) which was evaluated by Schumacher and Bernhard. Gottschlich (2012) points out that after the first World War and until the Second World War, Germany was attractive to the Indian students for higher studies partly due to nationalistic feelings against the British Raj in India. However, Jha chose neither Germany nor the nationalist economics. Availability of scholarship could have been a deciding factor, but it may also be noted that Germany pre-World War II and Germany post-World War II were quite different with particular reference to the political conditions in India, and hence her international relations, too.

The inclination of Professor Jha to do research on economic thought (especially with A.J. Brown and in the University of Leeds), however, might be a result of the same influence that attracted the students to the Historical and Nationalistic school of thought. Jha did not choose India's national economy for his research. It is likely that he was more influenced by the historical method of research on economic theory exemplified by the works of E.B. von Bawerk. The thoughts of Alfred Marshall were a synthesis of the theory of value pulled by the Austrian School and the Ricardo-Sraffa school in the two different directions. Additionally, Marshall was the leader of the Neo-Classical School. These factors together may at least partly explain the choice of the research topic by Professor Jha.

It is interesting to note that Professor A.J. Brown who was the principal supervisors of Prof. Jha had not explicitly shown much interest in the history of economic thought. Primarily, he was a scholar of applied economics, specializing in Keynesian economics and international trade. In the eyes of James Meade, Brown was a first rate economist, a very sound theoretician and analyst, but his main work had been in applied and descriptive economics. He did his doctoral research under the supervision of Jacob Marschak. He interacted with many of the leading economic thinkers of his time, such as Roy Harrod, Charles Hitch, John Hicks, Henry Phelps Brown, Bill Phillips, Wassily Leontief, and Oscar Lange. Much like Alfred Marshall, he was mathematical and extremely logical in his thinking, but explicitly he expressed himself in a non-mathematical language. Brown was critical of the approach used by the theoretical economists who, for perfecting the tools of analysis, went in for simplification to such an extent that the importance of the institutional background in determining the relevance of theoretical analysis was lost (Button, 2017). Brown's outlook to do economics is reflected in the work of Professor Jha, who remained very close to the historical reality and institutional set up in which the economic thought evolved in his study period what he called the age of Marshall.

It appears that A.E.C. Hare (see Calendar 1952-53 of the Univ. Of Leeds) might have influenced Jha in the determination of the topic of research. Hare, a

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contemporary to A.J. Brown, was an economic historian in the Department of Economics, the University of Leeds. Hare had investigated the labor question (Kaufman, 2004) and the issues regarding the social and industrial relation (Hare, 1946, 1965), more particularly in New Zealand with special reference to the relations of capital and labour in industry, with a view to discovering means that would make for harmony in those relations (Barrowman, 1999).

In his research work, Jha categorized the evolution of economics thought under five major heads: (1) the theory of value, (2) international trade, (3) the labour question, (4) the economics of poverty and welfare, and (5) public finance. Hare might have helped Jha in studying the labour question. F.H. Awad from Cairo University (Faculty of Commerce) specialized in the economics of trade. He studied the economics of world (export) trade in a historical perspective (Awad, 1959) and worked in close association with Professor A.J. Brown. It is likely, therefore, that Awad could have been helpful to Jha in the study of economic thoughts in the subfield of international trade. Jha was well known to J.R. Hicks and Ursula Hicks. In particular, Ursula Hicks might have influenced Jha on public finance. Bryn R. Wilson, (on the Faculty of Economic and Social Studies) at the University of Leeds was a specialist on equality and social justice who might have influenced Jha's thoughts on the economics poverty and welfare. D.H. Robertson and J.R. Hicks might have been the most important persons who influenced Jha on the theory of value. The main contribution of Marshall in the theory of value was to synthesise the Austrian and the Ricardian theories of value. D.H. Robertson was acknowledged by Jha to have helped him on certain aspects of the Neo-Classical economics, which could have been the theory of value in particular and the Marshallian economics in general.

There are imprints of Leonard George Johnson on Professor Jha. Johnson was appointed lecturer in the Departments of Economics at Leeds in 1947. Johnson had some interest in biographical research impinging on political economy and economic policy. His (Johnson, 1955) work on Richard Jones (a well known British historical economist, a critic of David Ricardo and T.R. Malthus, and professor of political economy at the East India College, Haileybury) was a centenary tribute to the latter. He also wrote the biography T.P. Thompson (Johnson, 1957) and used the archives, MS.277, of the Leeds University. T.P. Thompson was a British Parliamentarian and a leading activist in the Anti-Corn Law League during 1830's and 1840s. He specialized in the grass-roots mobilisation of opinion through pamphlets, newspaper articles, correspondence, speeches, and endless local planning meetings. It is well known, that the Corn and the Poor Laws in the mid nineteenth century England were hotly debated politico-economic issues and some of the influential economists, not indifferent to vested class interests, were intellectually and political involved in dealing with them (Myrdal, 1930). Johnston might have also been interested in the labour question and welfare economics promoted by Alfred Marshall. It is partly evident from his book (Johnson, 1959), which was an attempt to synthesize the literature regarding the creation of an industrial working class and its cultural and political, and to some extent economic, development in the 18th, the 19th and the early 20th centuries in Britain.

4. Methodology of research on history of economic thought

Jha used a very interesting methodology of research in his doctoral research. It has been detailed out in his book (Jha, 1963; 1973). He also elaborated this method in a paper (Jha, 1968). His suggestion to use the methods, suggested by Webbs (Beatrice and Sidney), for research in the history of economic thought is to investigate the problem like "a historian who reports on, interprets, and explains events between two points of time, a historian of thought, too, is concerned with the reporting of evolution and evaluation of ideas in the context of history and of contemporary ideas. Like a historian, he also aims at reconstructing a vanished complex of events, persons, ideas, social and economic forces and time. Like a

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good historian he too is concerned with showing the process through which, and the stages through which, a given complex of ideas yields place to a new complex of ideas. In this, methods of quantitative analysis can certainly play a very useful and often a more extended role as I have shown, but they can take us only part of the way. The rest of the road is one which historians have always used and the Webbs indicated. ... A historian can use and does use the statical, the dynamical and the method of comparative statics in writing history as Professor Hicks has pointed out (*Capital and Growth*, p.11). A historian of economic thought could also make use of these methods." The facts that he refers to the book (*Capital and Growth*) of J.R. Hicks, he is knowing Ursula Webb Hicks, and Ursula K. Webb (Hicks) is sometimes thought as the daughter of Martha Beatrice Webb and Sidney James Webb (e.g. [Fourcade, 2009](#), p.146), may lead one to think that Jha reached the method of Webbs through John and Ursula Hicks. But it is unlikely because Ursula was the daughter of William Fisher and Isabella Mary (nee Hayward) Webb and not of Sidney and Beatrice Webb. As Creedy (2011) points out "But again very little is known in the economics profession about Ursula and her background, to the extent that more than one internet site states with confidence, and in ignorance of its inanity, that she was the daughter of Sidney and Beatrice Webb." It is more likely, therefore, that Jha reached the method of Webbs through the book of John R. Hicks.

5. Some observations

It is interesting to note that although Jha frequently visited Cambridge (the Marshall Library of Economics, Prof. Dennis H. Robertson, and possibly he also met Piero Sraffa, all in Cambridge), he did not mention (in his *The Age of Marshall* or anywhere else) A.C. Pigou among those who extended any help to him. Nor did he mention any contact with James Meade (whom his supervisor, A.J. Brown knew so well), Mrs. Joan Robinson, Richard Kahn or Nicholas Kaldor (who was invited by Jawaharlal Nehru to design an expenditure tax system for India in the 1950s). Instead, he acknowledged the help of Hicks (John R. as well as Ursula, K.) who were at Oxford, rather far away from Cambridge. It is understandable that Meade, Joan Robinson, Kahn, and Kaldor were not so much 'Marshallian'. But Professor Pigou, who was a devoted Marshallian and in the know of many things about Marshall and his influence in the social as well as academic fields, could have been a great resource person. There is some doubt raised if Pigou was a true Marshallian (Knight, 2014). However, this question may be asked about D.H. Robertson as well as J.R. Hicks. Therefore, this question remains open. Yet, if we rely on personal conversations, Prof. Jha, in relation to his research, met Pigou. But Pigou was too old to help him in any significant manner. It may be noted when Jha began his research (in 1950s), Pigou was in the late 70s of his age.

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