

The Chosen One: Krishna Bharadwaj (1935-1992)

Goddanti Omkarnath

I Introduction

It is evident that Krishna Bharadwaj was not the first Indian economist to engage with classical political economy (henceforth CPE) in general or Piero Sraffa's work in particular. She was, in her own time, the youngest of them and most consequential at that, having made CPE the centre-piece of virtually all her work. The present account of Bharadwaj's work and persona highlights four features that seem to set her apart from other scholars. The first one is that she was completely home-grown as an economist. All her training, including doctoral study, was in India. This was by choice (see below) and unlike the case of her seniors like Arun Bose and Gautam Mathur, and contemporaries such as Sukhamoy Chakravarty and Amartya Sen. When she published her well-known review of Sraffa's *Production of Commodities by Means of Commodities* (Sraffa 1960; henceforth PCMC) in the Indian journal *Economic Weekly* (see Bharadwaj 1963), she was teaching at Bombay University and had no direct exposure to Cambridge, UK.

The second feature relates to Bharadwaj's approach to research in CPE. She was, of course, committed to the Sraffa project of elaborating on the distinctive structure of classical system, especially its 'openness' to history, as also debunking Marshall's attempt to establish a continuity in economic theory right up to marginalism. Perhaps less inclined to formalism and mathematical deepening of the Sraffa system, she focused on the history of economic *theory* (which she carefully distinguished from history of economic *thought*)¹ to explore the development and structure of the 'surplus' approach to economic theory. Interest in methodological issues in classical and neoclassical systems was derivative of this primary interest. From early on, this implied disinterested scholarship and a meticulous reading of classics in original. A privileged access to Sraffa, which she certainly had, meant no concession on that account. For Sraffa, in the manner of an oriental sage, often raised more questions than he answered. Her scholarly convictions were shown when Bharadwaj expressed principled disagreements with her other mentors Joan Robinson and Maurice Dobb.

Thirdly, the scope of Bharadwaj's research extended beyond Sraffa's critical and reconstructive project insofar as it concerned the theory of the

Goddanti Omkarnath, Professor of Economics, University of Hyderabad, P O Central University, Hyderabad 500046, Telangana, Email:omkarnath.hyd@gmail.com