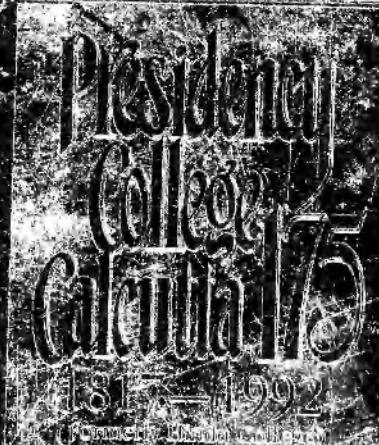


175th Anniversary Souvenir



A Note from the Principal

The week-long 175th anniversary celebrations of Presidency College were originally planned to be held in Mid-December last year and, as it must have been known to many, Dr. S. D. Sharma, the Hon'ble President of India kindly agreed to inaugurate our celebrations on 14th December in the afternoon. However, because of the unfortunate situation in the country in early December 1992, the Hon'ble President had to cancel his visit to West Bengal and, accordingly, we had to postpone our celebrations.

Since then we have been trying at our end to begin our postponed celebrations at the earliest opportunity and we now all feel very glad and grateful that the Hon'ble President has kindly consented to inaugurate our celebrations on Sunday, the 14th March at 11 a.m. After inauguration the celebrations, I may mention, will continue upto 20th March, 1993.

On this auspicious occasion I thank those who have given us the best of their help and co-operation for making our celebrations possible at last.

Amal Kumar Mukhopadhyay

Principal, Presidency College

An Editorial Note

The preparations for the 175th Anniversary Celebrations of Presidency College had entered the final stages on 6th December, 1992, when the dark clouds of fundamentalism overshadowed the entire country. We used the brief respite on the 9th to make ready the thousands of invitation cards and programmes that were to be despatched. The following morning curfew was clamped on the city; we soon received news that the President had cancelled his proposed visit.

Presidency College has a long history of facing and overcoming similar problems. The Centenary of the founding of this august institution could not be properly celebrated in 1917 due to the First World War. In 1967, the 150th Anniversary Celebrations were overshadowed by a movement that had its genesis in this very college. We are confident that the problems that presently loom large over the horizon will be resolved and the College will look back placidly over 175 years of its existence.

The messages of good wishes that we have received anticipated mid-December as the date of the celebrations. We welcome you in this time of remembrance; let us all solemnly hope that an even more glorious future lies ahead of Presidency College.

S. Datta

Convenor

22nd December, 1992

Souvenir & Reception Sub-committee

Contributors to the 175th Anniversary Souvenir

Dr. Pratap Chandra Chunder	Ex-Education Minister, Govt. of India President, Presidency College, Alumni Association, Calcutta
Dr. Bhabatosh Datta	Emeritus Professor, Deptt. of Economics, Presidency College, Calcutta
Dr. Pratul Chandra Rakshit	Ex-Professor & Head of the Deptt. of Chemistry, Presidency College, Calcutta
Dr. Amal Kumar Raychaudhuri	Ex-Professor & Head of the Deptt. of Physics, Presidency College, Calcutta
Dr. Gouri Nag	Ex-Director of Public Instruction, Govt. of West Bengal
Dr. S. P. Mukherjee	Professor of Statistics & Former Dean of the Faculty of Science, University of Calcutta
Dr. Biswanath Das	Bursar & Reader of Statistics, Presidency College, Calcutta
Dr. Atindra Mohan Goon	Professor & Head of the Deptt. of Statistics, Presidency College, Calcutta

F o r e w o r d

Hindu College, which after thirty-eight years of its eventful existence took the present name of Presidency College, was founded on 20th January, 1817. Thus, this year, our institution has completed 175 years of its life. To commemorate this historic event, we have planned a year-long programme of celebrations which began with felicitations offered to fourteen of our past teachers and employees on 20th January, 1992, traditionally observed as our Founders' Day. The main celebration is being held now for a week, with its inauguration by the Hon'ble President of India on 14th December, 1992, and the year will culminate in a function to be held on 20th January, 1993.

Completion of 175 years in the life of an academic institution in our country is, by all standards, an uncommon event, celebrating which must be a matter of joy and pride for all of us, the present students, teachers, and employees of Presidency College. It is, however, for us not only a time for joy but also an hour of remembrance. Thus, while celebrating, we also gratefully remember the colossal efforts of our founders and the great heritage they left for us, the outstanding contribution consistently made at different periods of history by the teachers of this college, and the memorable role played by our students in the past in the service of the nation.

Today Presidency College, Calcutta is regarded by all as the premier institution of India not only for the high standard of teaching and research we have been maintaining throughout, but also because of its glorious role in the making of Indian history. In view of this, the present celebration is also for us a time to renew our pledge – the pledge to give the best of our efforts for national progress, and to make historic departures for the country in the future.

For the present celebrations we have received help and co-operation from many quarters. I thank them all and also seek blessings and best wishes from the people of our country. During the last 175 years we have seen, no doubt, magnificent achievements, but there is still a long way to go. There is, therefore, no room for complacency. Let this auspicious occasion be a reminder to us all that, whatever be the adversities, we have to move forward with dedication and hard work, and strive for maintaining the unique character of our institution.

Amal Kumar Mukhopadhyay
*Principal, Presidency College and
Secretary, 175th Anniversary Celebrations Committee.*

The 175th Anniversary Celebrations

The Presidency College of Bengal celebrates the 175th Anniversary of Hindoo College (1817) in 1992. The Hindoo College and the Presidency College of Bengal are juridically distinct, and yet in fact one and the same by virtue of the cessation of the former and its merger with the latter. The Presidency College of Bengal inherited in 1855 the staff, the students and the site of Hindoo College, but the management was different: the Committee of Managers of Hindoo College gave way to the Government of Bengal. The Presidency College of Bengal officially adopted 20 January, the date on which Hindoo College was founded, as the Founders' Day under Principal Henry Rosher James. The Presidency College of Bengal celebrated the centenary of the Hindoo College in 1917. The poem entitled "On the Centenary of the Presidency College" was written by the late Professor Manmohan Ghosh on the occasion of the centenary of Hindoo College on the 20th January, 1917, and it appeared in the centenary number of the Presidency College Magazine in the same month and year. It again celebrated the centenary of the transformation of Hindoo College into Presidency College of Bengal in 1955. And it now celebrates the 175th Anniversary of Hindoo College with the same logic as adopted in 1917.

Message from

Sri Jyoti Basu

Chief Minister, Government of West Bengal

I am glad to know that the 175th Anniversary of Presidency College, Calcutta will be Celebrated in the second week of March, 1993. It is, indeed, gratifying that the President of India will inaugurate the Celebrations.

Presidency College occupies a very significant place in the academic scene of the country. The role of this institution has become more important and crucial in today's context. I am sure that Presidency College will uphold its glorious tradition.

I wish the 175th Anniversary Celebrations of this College all success.

Message from

Satyasadhan Chakraborty

Minister-in-Charge, Higher Education
Government of West Bengal

It is a great pleasure to note that the members of the staff and the students of Presidency College along with the Alumni Association are organising a week-long programme commencing from December 15, 1992 to celebrate the 175th year of its existence.

Presidency College has had a long and distinguished record. It has produced great scientists and eminent scholars. Many scholars and scientists have made outstanding contributions to literature and art, science and scholarship. The students of this College are to be found in all parts of India and have won for this College reputation for competence and capacity. It has given to this country leadership in science and letters, education and social work, administration and public service.

I offer my warm greetings to teachers, students, non-teaching staff and the Alumni Association of Presidency College and I wish the College a future even greater than its past.

Message from

G. Ram Reddy

Chairman, University Grants Commission

I am delighted to learn that Presidency College, Calcutta will be celebrating its 175th Anniversary in December 1992. Presidency College is one of the oldest and very prestigious colleges in the country. Its contribution to higher education is invaluable, several of its alumni have occupied very important positions in this country.

Even though we have today 7,000 colleges, Presidency College is a cut above many colleges. I trust the College will grow from strength to strength in the service of the nation.

Message from

Professor Rathindranarayan Basu
Vice-Chancellor, University of Calcutta

It is a matter of great rejoicing that the Presidency College is going to celebrate its 175th Anniversary from 15th to 20th December, 1992 and to commemorate the occasion a souvenir will be published, which I am confident, will be educative and informative to all concerned.

It is also heartening to note that during these long years the College has produced a large number of bright and brilliant students who have distinguished themselves in their respective fields of endeavours and eminent personalities who have left their marks in virtually all aspects of social, political and academic arena of the country.

I express my heartfelt appreciation to the services rendered by the enlightened pioneers who started the College and all those who were responsible for maintaining the great tradition of upholding the eminence of the college in the academic field. I am confident that the college will not only maintain its traditional role but also give still more to the society at large in the years to come.

On this happy occasion, I convey my best wishes to the teachers, students and the non-teaching staff of the college who are actively engaged in making this function a grand success.

I wish that the 175th Anniversary Celebration of the college will be a great success.

Message from

Professor Pratip Kumar Mukerjee
Vice-Chancellor, Jadavpur University

I am extremely happy to learn that in commemoration of the 175th Anniversary of Presidency College, the Principal, staff and students of the College along with the Alumni Association, are organising a weeklong celebration, scheduled for 14th to 21st December, 1992.

I was myself a student of Presidency College during the period from 1946 to 1952 and was a Professor there during the period of 1966 to 1969 and I am proud of my association with Presidency College as a student and thereafter as a teacher.

I sincerely hope that the Celebration proposed to be held during the period from 14th to 21st December, 1992, in commemoration of the 175th Anniversary of Presidency College shall be a grand success.

Message from

Sabyasachi Bhattacharya

Upacharya, Visva-Bharati

There is an invisible college which has members all over the world, the alumni of Presidency College, Calcutta. The togetherness of class-mates at the college for a few years is a sometime thing. But the ties of common loyalty to that Institution last longer and connect generations. I have heard from my father that when he joined Presidency College in 1914, he often met at the Hindu Hostel ex-students who had been to College in the late 19th Century. Although I have been away from Calcutta for the major part of my working life I met elsewhere every now and then Presidency College men and women and one immediately senses an empathy born of shared tradition. Personally I value this as much as the academic excellence that characterises research and teaching in Presidency College. I am happy to be associated with the Celebration of the 175th Anniversary of the foundation of what was then known as the Hindu College.

Message from

Professor Mohit Bhattacharya
Vice-Chancellor, The University of Burdwan

It is gratifying to note that Presidency College is celebrating its 175th anniversary from 15th December, 1992, and to commemorate this occasion, a week-long programme has been arranged.

As a former student of this great College, I take this opportunity to convey, through you, my heartiest congratulations to all the teachers, scholars, students and non-teaching staff members of the College for organising the celebration.

I sincerely wish all success of the Anniversary Celebration.

Message from

Prof. K. N. Chatterjee.
Vice-Chancellor, University of North Bengal

I am so very glad to know that the Presidency College, Calcutta is to celebrate its one hundred and seventy-fifth anniversary this year.

The College is one of the prime institutions of the country. It has contributed its mite to the cause of education for nearly two centuries. Galaxies of academic luminaries in various disciplines originated from this College.

The spirit of renaissance in Bengal and for that matter in the country as a whole had its roots in this college as well. It has remained a guiding star in the field of education and learning that the country can boast of and I believe, it will remain to be so for centuries to come.

Message from

Professor Satya Narayan Ghosh
Vice-Chancellor, Vidyasagar University, Midnapore

I learn with great pleasure that the Calcutta Presidency College is going to celebrate its one hundred and seventy-fifth anniversary in December, 1992. This premier institution of India has not only produced innumerable scholars of eminence but has also contributed almost extravagantly to the cultural life of Bengal. Its long and glorious tradition is a pride for all of us who care for the educational standard of the country.

I firmly believe that the institution founded as it is on the extraordinary scholarship, profound wisdom and untiring efforts of the generations of luminaries will maintain its brilliance in the years to come and will continue to illuminate young minds in the same way as it has done in the years gone by.

Please accept my good wishes on this very happy occasion.

175th Anniversary of Presidency College

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✓ Sri Satya Sadhan Chakraborty
Minister, Higher Education, West Bengal

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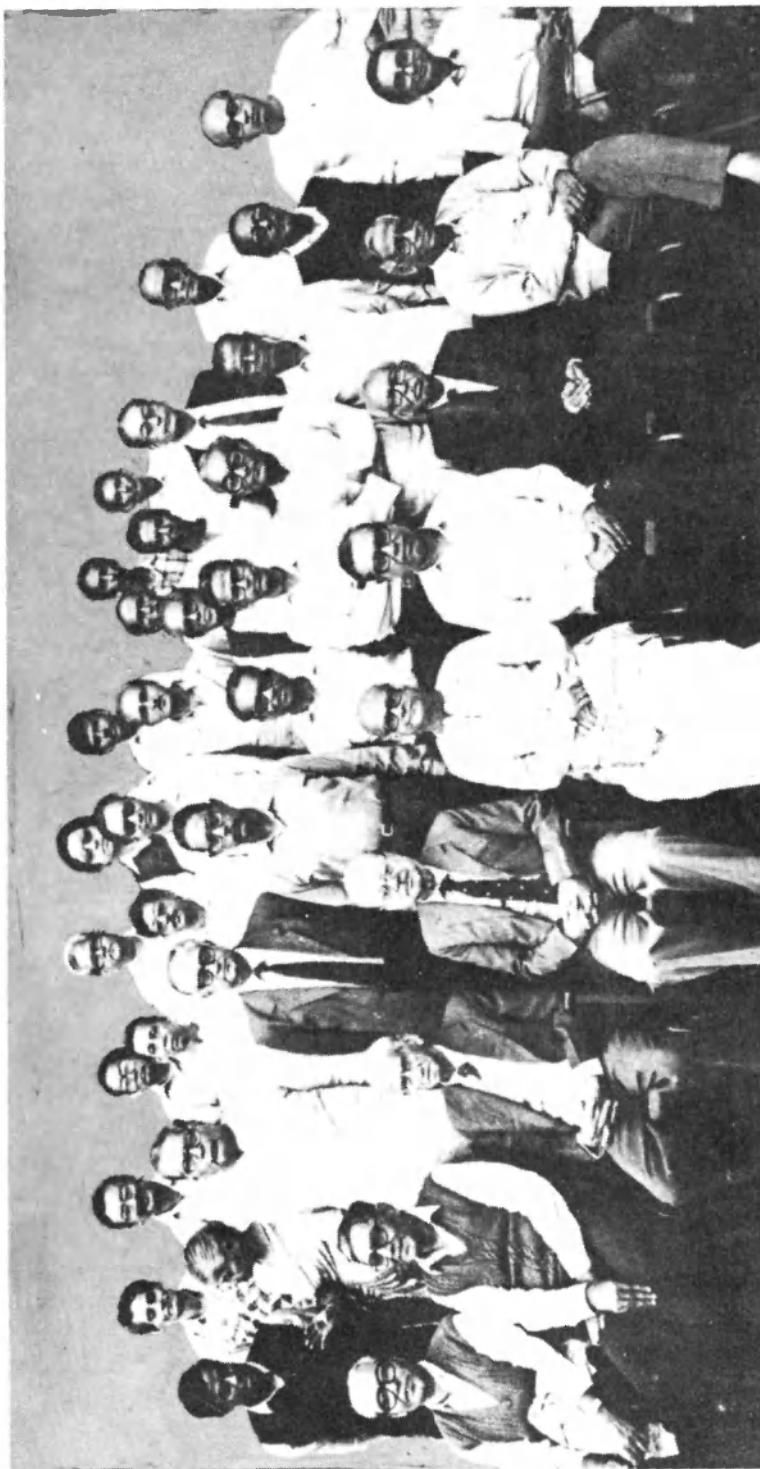
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Sri Dilip Kumar Roy

Sri Pitabash Acharya

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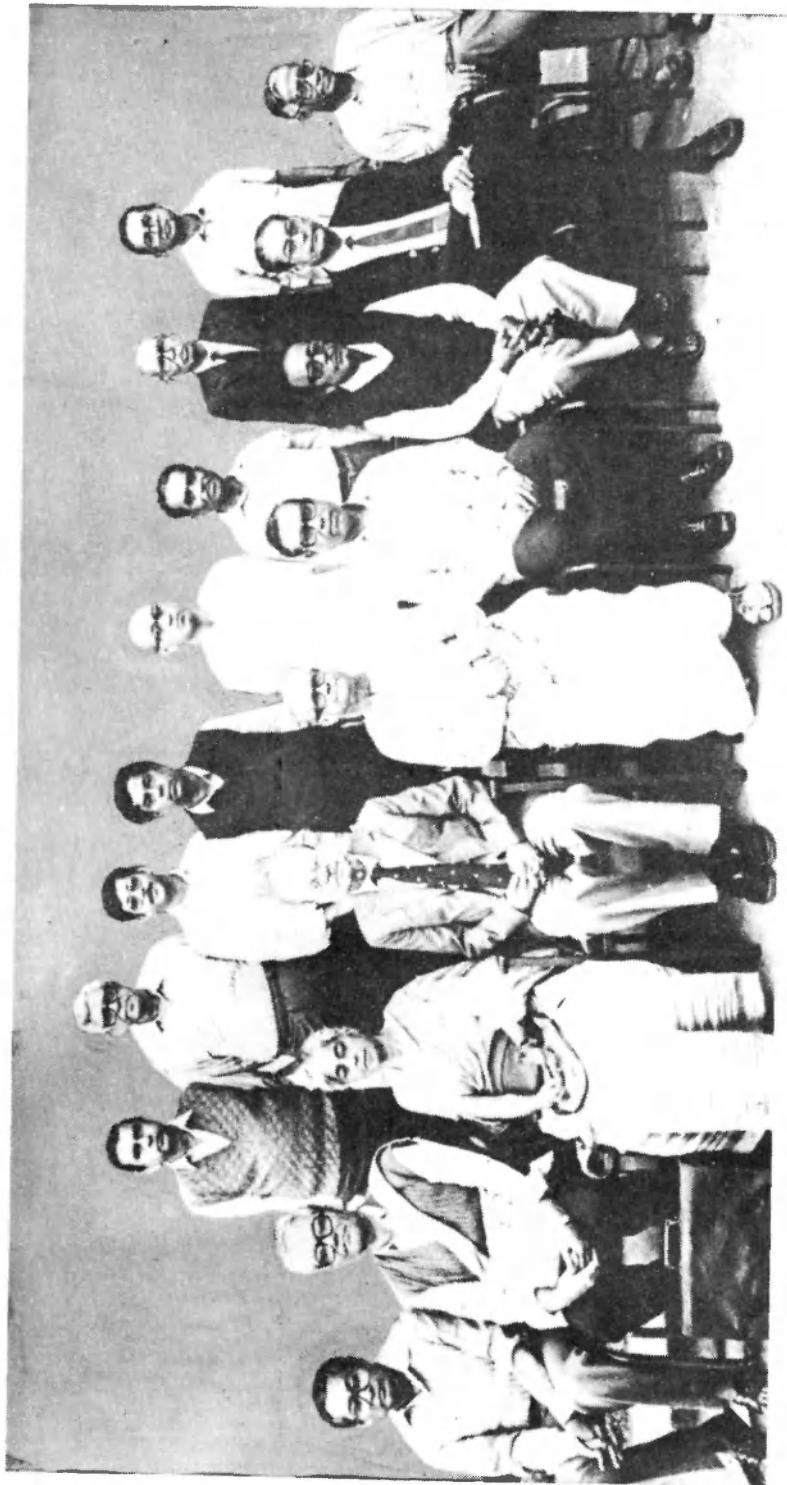
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Other Members not present

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Other Members not present

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We mourn the sad demise of two patrons, Satyajit Ray and Gouri Nath Sastri, and of a member of the Organising Committee, Bikas Chandra Ghosh.

175th Anniversary Celebrations Presidency College, Calcutta

Cultural Programme

14th — 20th March, 1993

Sunday, 14th March (Evening Session)

5.00 p.m.-6.00 p.m.	Inauguration of Exhibition	:	Prof. Hiren Mukherjee President : Prof. Satya Sadhan Chakraborty
6.00 p.m.-6.15 p.m.	Opening dance and opening songs	:	Presidency College Choir
6.15 p.m.-6.30 p.m.	Songs on national integration	:	Present students
6.30 p.m.-7.00 p.m.	Smriti Alekhya Presidency College - 175	:	Sri Biplab Moitra Sri Pradip Ghosh Sm. Ratna Sen Sm. Sudeshna Basu
7.00 p.m.	Kabir Chokhey Naari (Dance-drama)	:	Present students (Direction Sm. Rekha Moitra)

Monday, 15th March

5.00 p.m.-5.10 p.m.	Opening Songs	:	Presidency College Choir
5.10 p.m.-5.30 p.m.	Western Vocal	:	Present students
5.30 p.m.-6.00 p.m.	Songs of Nazrul	:	Sri Harinarayan Pal and Sm. Sarmila Pal
6.00 p.m.	Madhab Malanchi Kainya (Drama)	:	Anya Theatre (Direction : Sri Bibhas Chakraborty)

A national seminar on 'The State of Indian Economy' will be held on any day between 16.03.1993 and 18.03.1993 at 2.00 p.m. The exact date will be announced later.

Tuesday, 16th March

5.00 p.m.-5.10 p.m.	Opening Songs	:	Presidency College Choir
5.10 p.m.- 7.00 p.m.	Kavi Sammelan	:	Participants : Sri Haraprosad Moitra, Sri Sudha Satta Basu, Sri Sankha Ghosh, Sri Shakti Chatterjee, Sri Sunil Ganguly, Sri Joy Goswami, Sri Sabyasachi Dev, Sri Manjubhas Mitra, Sm. Krishna Basu, Sm. Mallika Sengupta, Sri Krishna Dhar, Sri Pranabendu Das Gupta, Sri Dibyendu Palit, Sri Niren Chakraborty, Sri Tarapada Roy, Sri Santosh Chakraborty, Sri Kali Krishna Guha, Sri Aloke R. Das Gupta, Sri Partha Sarathi Chowdhury, Sri Amal Mukherjee, Sri Shalikh Lucknowyee, Sri Shyamal Mukherjee, Sri Bishwanath Das, Sri Dipankar Basu, Sri Subrata Lahiri, Sri Subodh Sarkar.
7.00 p.m.	Shruti Natak	:	Sm. Aparna Sen and Dipankar De

Wednesday, 17th March

5.00 p.m.-5.15 p.m.	Opening Songs	:	Presidency College Choir
5.15 p.m.-6.30 p.m.	Classical Vocal	:	Sri Ajoy Chakraborti
6.30 p.m.-7.30 p.m.	Dance (Odissi)	:	Sm. Sutopa Dattagupta
7.30 p.m.	Violin	:	Pt. V. G. Jog and
	Sarod	:	Shri Buddhadev Dasgupta

Thursday, 18th March

5.00 p.m.-5.10 p.m.	Opening Songs	:	Presidency College Choir
5.10 p.m.-7.00 p.m.	Variety Performance by Ex-Students	:	
	Vocal	:	Sri Dipak Rudra, Sm. Indrani Mukherjee, Sri Prabir Guha Thakurta, Sm. Rajashree Bhattacharyya, Sri Partha Ghosh, Sm. Jasodhara Bagchi

Recitation	:	Sm. Raya Bhattacharya Sri Ranjan Kumar Ray	
Vocal	:	Sm. Gouri Chatterjee, Sri Prodosh Bhattacharyya, Sm. Chitralekha Chowdhury	
7.00 p.m.	Kathak Dance	:	Sm. Amita Datta

Friday, 19th March

2.00 p.m.-5.00 p.m.	Symposium	:	Presidency College : Past, Present and Future
5.00 p.m.-5.10 p.m.	Opening Songs	:	Presidency College Choir
5.10 p.m.-5.40 p.m.	Bhinna Swader- Kabita	:	Presidency College Karmi Sanskritik Samstha
	Choreography	:	Shri Shyamal Kr. Mukherjee
5.40 p.m.-6.30p.m.	Hindi Drama Black Sunday of '92	:	Present students (Written & directed by Zaheer Anwar)
6.30 p.m.-7.00 p.m.	Folk Songs	:	Sri Sukhabilas Barma
7.00 p.m.	Modern Songs	:	Sri Manna De

Saturday, 20th March

2.00 p.m.-4.30 p.m.	Seminar	:	'The Menace of Communalism'
5.00 p.m.-5.10 p.m.	Opening Songs	:	Presidency College Choir
5.10 p.m.-5.45 p.m.	Recitation	:	Sri Pradip Ghosh
5.45 p.m.-6.00 p.m.	Rabindra Sangeet	:	Sm. Kalyani Ghosh
6.00 p.m.-7.00 p.m.	Rabindra Sangeet	:	Sm. Ritu Guha
7.00 p.m.	Ananda Basanta Samagamey Dance Drama	:	Dancers' Guild (Direction Dr. Sm. Manjushri Chaki Sarkar)

Compering

Sm. Madhumanti Moitra
&
Sm. Raya Bhattacharya

Programmes are subject to change

Presidency College : Legend and Reality

Pratap Chandra Chunder

I am a student of Hindu School and Presidency College, both successors to Hindu College, of which we are celebrating 175th year. The tradition is glorious and inspiring, but it imposed on me a special burden to live upto it. Often I felt my own shortcomings, yet was spurred to do better, which, I modestly feel, I did. To me Presidency College is not only a legend with its galaxy of illustrious teachers and students, but a living, vibrant, and creative reality which moulded my mind and personality. It was not a conglomeration of buildings, class rooms, libraries, and laboratories, but a crucible for fusing young minds.

I shall not name any particular teacher lest I forget to mention others. I am indebted to them individually and collectively. I must state that in this College I first tasted intellectual freedom. At school I was dominated by my teachers' personalities. There I was shy and reticent, always looking upto their moods. But here in the College I opened up, reached out, and thought - independently. My fellow-students (some were extremely brilliant) came from all over the country. Alas ! there was no girl student to give colour to our class. Our mutual contact was close and co-operative; and competition,

beneficial and productive. The teaching method encouraged the development of the critical faculty.

Our College Union was not an elected body then. Its office bearers were chosen by the Professor-in-Charge. I was nominated to be the General Secretary. Abu Syed Chowdhury, my classmate and later the first President of Bangladesh, was the Secretary of the College Magazine. We worked together amicably. Here in the College we imbibed the spirit of secularism, which was a part of the tradition of the College. Here I learnt the rudiments of organisation. As a student of the College I was elected the first President of the University Students' Union. Many more elections I fought in later years. I was not at all good in College sports and games, I hardly took any part in them. But I was encouraged to participate in College dramatics. The acting was an all-male affair. I was induced to perform the roles of heroines in Tagore's *Gora* and *Chira Kumar Sabha*, a fun I still remember. But this audacity gave me enough courage to participate in amateur dramatics and radio-plays, and turn into a playwright.

I largely owe to my College whatever I am today.

Recollections of a Twenties Undergraduate

Subodh Chandra Sengupta

I came to Presidency College with a First Grade Scholarship from a remote village in the district of Faridpur (now in Bangladesh). To me, everything in Calcutta was new, and Presidency College – the premier college of the country – somewhat awesome. Our classes were held generally in the rooms on the second floor of the Main Building. There was an English Principal at the top during all the six years that I was a student there. Besides, the two teachers of English, Mr Sterling and Mr Holme, were Englishmen, who occupied what is now known as Room no. 23 on the first floor. A typed routine was strictly followed. Students, specially in more crowded classes, had to sit according to roll order. There were one-hour periods with an interval of seven minutes between the first and the second bells. It was a crime for a student to be found in the corridors after the second bell had rung. The professors were not easily accessible to a student, who had to send in a slip through the two or three bearers sitting outside the Professors' Common Room.

So far as the teaching was concerned, I did not at first find anything really exceptional, except that Logic was a new subject, and that the teacher, who I later discovered to be a very soft-hearted man, looked somewhat formidable. One thing was noticeable : the regular routine with periodical exercises, and the tutorial classes in English, without such exercises.

Mr Sterling, the Senior Professor of

English, used to teach us English pronunciation. A cheerful man, he would ask each of us to read four lines of an English text, and would immediately mimic our sing-song Bengali intonation, which, he said, was foreign to English. I do not know if my pronunciation was improved by this exercise, but he was such 'a jolly good fellow', that we all regarded his classes as great fun. His own speech was certainly without the trace of any provincial accent. Seven years later, when I left the College, he was the Principal, and I remember with gratitude that he gave me a very good testimonial.

The most remarkable fact about him is that this 'foreigner' nursed the memory of his connection with Presidency College when he was in faraway England, from where he would send many queries about men and things of his time, not directly to me, but through students who had gone to England, and with whom it was a practice to pay him a visit. A bachelor, Professor Sterling left all his savings for the benefit of poor students in Presidency College.

Except for the slight break which was brought about by Mahatma's Non-Cooperation Movement in 1920-21, academic work in Presidency College went on smoothly. In the Second Year Class in 1921, one of our teachers, Mr B. C. Bose, who, I heard, was deeply religious, one day absented himself without notice and never turned up again. After a week or so, Professor

Srikumar Banerjee was asked to take his classes in English poetry for us. After the lapse of more than seventy years, I still remember that Srikumarbabu asked us to explain the last two lines of Wordworth's sonnet *On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic*, the poem Mr Bose had been lecturing on. After a fumbling effort by me and one or two of my friends, Professor Banerjee explained the sonnet to us. The student who was sitting by me, the most brilliant of my contemporaries, whispered, "Today our coming to Presidency College is justified." He might have been referring to the monthly tuition fee of Rs. 12/-, which was higher than that in most other colleges, who charged around half the amount.

After that, if I remember rightly, Professor Banerjee taught, among other works, poems of Tennyson, some translations from Dante's *Divina Commedia*, and Longfellow's poem on Dante. The most memorable experience of my Intermediate classes remains a parallel drawn by Professor Banerjee between Longfellow's *Apostrophe to Dante* and Rabindranath's poem on *Meghdoot*. It should be remembered that Professor Banerjee retired as a Professor of Bengali at Calcutta University.

In 1922, I returned to the College with a First Grade Scholarship, and took up Honours in English. In our time, the B.A. syllabus covered two years. Students had to take Honours in one subject, had two pass subjects, and had one compulsory paper in Bengali. Nobody bothered about pass subjects which were very easy in Presidency College. Two renowned teachers of the time were Sir Jahangir Coyajee in Economics, and Professor Kuruvilla

Zachariah in History. To me, my Honours subject English was most important, and I met more than one distinguished teacher. The greatest of them all was Professor Praphulla Chandra Ghosh, whose lectures were an unforgettable experience for all of us. It was in his classes that seating arrangements according to the roll order could not be maintained because students would fight their way to the front benches.

I have written elsewhere at some length about Professor Ghosh. I will repeat one of my statements made in the book of memorial essays on him published by us. Two experiences in my life have been overwhelming : the sight of the silver-crested waves dashing against the sea-beach at Puri; and Professor Praphulla Chandra Ghosh's elucidation of Shakespeare. If in a future birth I am asked to choose between the two, I will choose the latter.

There are other teachers too whom I remember with gratitude. The Senior Professor, Mr Sterling, being a paper-setter for the B.A. examination, did not teach us anything, but the other Englishman on the staff, Mr J. W. Holme, did. Just as Mr Sterling very jocosely mimicked our sing-song English intonation, Mr Holme very seriously corrected the oriental tendency towards exaggeration and repetition in our writing. Indeed, once correcting an essay of mine, he told me that everytime I used an adjective again, my transgression would entail a one-rupee fine. His love for precision we found in his lectures on the history of English literature. What lingers in my mind is his tendency to give precise definitions of literary and historical concepts, such as the Renaissance being the 'apotheosis of man'.

I must also recall my gratitude to Professor Srikumar Banerjee who lectured on poetry. He delighted in luxuriant language, but could also catch the core of luxuriance which is the most essential characteristic of poetic speech.

Sir Asutosh Mukherjee, then the arbiter of the University in every branch, delighted in prescribing books translated into English from other European languages. One such book was the 1911 Belgian Nobel Laureate Maurice Maeterlinck's collection of essays entitled *The Buried Temple*. The then Senior Professor, Mr Holme, somewhat less romantic in temperament, declined to teach this highly philosophical discourse, and passed it on to Professor Banerjee. That resulted in another memorable experience which has enlivened whatever culture I have derived from books.

After graduation, we came to the University of Calcutta which had taken away M.A. classes from colleges. The University depended on tuition and examination fees for the maintenance of the post-graduate classes. There was, thus, no restriction on the number of students to be admitted. By and large this resulted in a low standard of teaching, and proved to be a depressing experience for me. Mr Holme had by then left government service, and among my post-graduate teachers, there was still Professor Srikumar Banerjee to lecture on poetic drama. Professor Prabhulla Chandra Ghosh taught Chaucer, taking us back mentally to fourteenth-century England with his scholarly recreation of details. He also lectured on *Hamlet* at Presidency College at our request. His teaching of Shakespeare was as great a marvel as it had been two years earlier.

Presidency College : Stray Thoughts

Bhabatosh Datta

Presidency College has the distinction of having two birthdays. The Hindu College, financed by private subscriptions, was established on January 20, 1817, for 'sons of respectable Hindus'. Thirty-eight years later, on June 15, 1855, the *Mahapathasala* division of the Hindu College was transformed into Presidency College, with its doors open for meritorious students, irrespective of class or creed. The *Pathasala* section continued as the Hindu School and the government took full charge of both the institutions.

The College thus has two parallel sequences of important anniversaries, one counting from 1817 and the other from 1855. The Hindu College celebrated its first centenary in 1917. The first centenary of Presidency College was celebrated with great *eclat* in 1955, with an illustrious ex-student, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the first President of independent India, as the Chief Guest. The Hindu College completes 175 years of its existence in 1992. Thirteen years from now, in 2005, Presidency College will hold its 150th anniversary function. Another twelve years later, in 2017, the Hindu College will complete its second century. And thus the two parallel sequences will continue. Every generation of students will have some special anniversary to celebrate.

* * *

It will be interesting to speculate what the shape of things will be at Presidency College in 2005, or in 2017. One hopes that the rich traditions will be maintained and that changes will be made to meet the requirements of the new generations. The history of Presidency College has been one of solid

traditions and dynamic changes. Very few remember today, that the college used to teach at one time Engineering, Law and Commerce. The Engineering classes were later converted into the Bengal Engineering College. The other two experiments were not pursued.

Changes may be concentrated within short spells of time. I entered the college as an under-graduate student in 1928, took my Honours degree in 1930, and then continued till 1932 as a post-graduate student. I returned to the college as a teacher in 1950. My contact with the college in the intervening eighteen years was limited. Within this period, particularly after the Second World War, many changes had taken place. The main building looked the same as it was in the older days, the historic staircase was there with all its grandeur. The book racks in the library were as dusty as they were in 1928. I found that I would have to take my Honours classes in the same Room Number 12 in which a large part of my student days was spent. Even after eighteen years the asymmetrical arrangement of the benches had not changed. Very surprisingly, the old blackboard was still there with its horizontal crack in the middle. I used the crack sometimes for drawing a horizontal price line and it also made it easy for me to draw a 'kinked' demand curve under monopolistic competition. The room was dark and dismal and it was also foul-smelling because the chemistry laboratory was next door. Fortunately, when the extension of the Baker Laboratory building was completed, our department was given a set of bright airy rooms.

The most striking change was the presence of women students - in the class rooms and the corridors, on the staircases and the lawns. The change came immediately after the Second World War. The college was a close preserve of men students until then. The only exception was Charulata Ray (daughter of Principal P. K. Ray) who did her First Arts course at the college during 1897-99. When I came to the college the women students dominated the classes in some subjects. They entered through open competition and their performance was very good. On one occasion, the teachers in a Life Science Department wanted a quota for men students. In the English Literature class, the girls occupied the classes, while the few men students waited outside until the arrival of the teacher.

* * *

There was a remarkable change in the Faculty common rooms. In my student days, we were not allowed to enter the rooms. If any student wanted to meet a teacher he had to send a slip through a bearer. The teacher, if available, would come out with displeasure marked on his face and would dismiss the student with a few curt sentences. In 1950, the swing doors were swinging all the time. The students came in freely. This had an undesirable consequence also, because the others who entered without obstruction included insurance agents, publishers' representatives, and even marriage brokers. And there were also attestation hunters. It was not generally known that the Faculty common rooms of the college had more gazetted officers per square foot than even the Writers' Buildings. There was also a close personal relationship between students and teachers. Students used to come to their teachers' homes, sometimes for discussion of an intricate problem, or for a simple chat. I do not remember to

have been to any of my teachers' homes during my student days.

* * *

There were changes in the academic coverage also. It was distressing to find that the Sanskrit Department of the College had been transferred to the Sanskrit College and the Arabic and Persian Departments to the Islamic College. New subjects had however been introduced. These included Statistics, Geography and Bengali Literature. During my time as a teacher, the Economics Department was bifurcated into two departments, Economics and Political Science. The performance of the students in all subjects, old and new, was outstanding every year. In fact, I would consider the nineteen fifties as a golden age in the recent history of the College.

* * *

Will the college ever be given the autonomous status which it richly deserves? The question has been under 'consideration' since 1951. Neither the government nor the university has been able to take the necessary bold step even after forty years. The control exercised by the university which treats Presidency College as just one of its affiliated colleges reduces everything to a low common denominator. The control exercised by the government makes it necessary for the Principal to run the college like a government department. One can only hope that the government and the university will take a firm decision in the matter before the turn of the century. If nothing is done the future will remain uncertain, particularly when the increase in technological innovations in the teaching and learning processes will call for revolutionary changes in every direction. It is only an autonomous body which can easily move with the times.

Reminiscences

P. C. Rakshit

I joined the Chemistry Department of Presidency College in the 1943-44 session when the Second World War was at its peak. I was not an alumnus of this college, nor a student of this University. Earlier, from a distance, I used to look at its majestic pillars and its tower-clock with awe and admiration. From my colleagues elsewhere, I heard a lot about this institution and its giant professors. That is why on the first day I entered the portals of this college with considerable trepidation.

This is the Presidency College which was at the root of the nineteenth century renaissance of Bengal, nay, of India. This is the Presidency College which radiated beams of knowledge and enlightenment from Kashmir to Kerala and from Gauhati to Gujarat. This is the Presidency College in whose laboratories the seeds of scientific research first germinated and its tentacles were spread to the four corners of the country by a monk-like frail young professor of chemistry. This is the Presidency College whose professors' erudition and scholarship became legends passing from generation to generation.

The thought uppermost in my mind at that moment was whether I would be able to discharge my duties well enough to carve a niche in this temple of fame with its galaxy of illustrious professors.

Prof. A. K. Chanda was the Principal and Dr. M. Qudrati Khuda was the Head of the Department of Chemistry

when I joined. There was a host of eminent senior professors in different departments, such as Dr. Joges Chandra Sinha, Dr. Nalinikanta Brahma, Dr. Srikumar Banerjee, Prof. Janardan Chakraborti, Prof. Susobhan Sarkar, Prof. Somnath Maitra, Prof. Tarapada Mukherjee, Dr. Kamlesh Chandra Kar, Prof. Girija Majumder and many others. Sometime later arrived Dr. Subodh Chandra Sen Gupta, Prof. Gopinath Bhattacharjya, Dr. Sarojbandhu Sanyal et al. All of them received one with open arms and I was overwhelmed by their kindness, sympathy and genuine goodwill. My initial fear was thus found to be entirely baseless.

Among my contemporaries were many bright men who had already earned great reputation and were adored by students; professors like Tarak Sen, Prabasjiban Choudhuri, Bhabatosh Dutt, Santosh Roy, Rajendralal Sengupta, A. W. Mahmood, Bhupesh Mukherjee, Sachhidananda Banerjee, Susil Siddhanta and others. My close association and friendship with these young professors, their co-operation and help, gave me enough encouragement and made my work easier.

Teaching in Presidency College is a pleasure and brings its own reward. The students were bright and there was always an eager inquisitiveness on their faces for more information, more knowledge and better exposition, especially in the Intermediate and

Honours classes. To feed this appetite for knowledge I had to work very hard and prepare myself thoroughly before entering any class. I had served in other colleges earlier; the teaching here was completely different from that in other colleges.

Many brilliant students would often ask me some critical questions in the class or outside to which I could not give immediate answers. I had to search in various journals and books or discuss the issue with colleagues to find the answers. In this way, the students forced me indirectly to read and learn more. For this I am truly indebted to them. Whatever little I learnt of higher science was possible because I had the good fortune of coming to this college.

Every teacher here, senior or junior, was fully conscious of his responsibilities and tried his utmost to give his best. Out of innumerable instances, I mention here only two. One evening at about 8 P.M. in the forties, my Head of the Department, Dr. Nirmal Kumar Sen, my old teacher at Dacca College, rang me up and asked me to come to the college at 9 A.M. on the following day. When I arrived he was already there. He opened a page of the organic chemistry book (written by me) and pointed to a particular paragraph. It concerned the study of the constitution of a molecule. There were eight arguments to establish the molecular structure. Dr. Sen asked me to explain one of the arguments. He was not acquainted with it because it was not known in his student - days. For nearly half-an-hour I told him all about this particular point, starting from fundamental concepts. He was satisfied and repeated it to me and then said; "You see Rakshit, I have to take up this problem to-day with the First Year boys.

I did not like to omit this point, so I have to learn from you."

One day in the early fifties, a few minutes after 10.30 a.m., Professor Subodh Sengupta hurriedly entered my room, put down his umbrella and books and rushed out to his class. He appeared dishevelled, without a bath or a shave. After an hour he returned from the class. He told me that he had been reading the "Statesman" in his house when Professor Bagchi, his student and colleague, who was passing that way asked him if he would not be going to college. Dr. Sengupta replied that it was his day off. Prof. Bagchi reminded him that he had a tutorial class. Dr. Sengupta recalled this and immediately hired a taxi in order to reach the college in time for the tutorial class! Such was the sense of duty in those days.

In the forties, many changes and events occurred in quick succession. In 1944, co-education was introduced in the college. We thought that girl students were not likely to do well, especially in the science streams. This was belied. Many of the top places and the coveted first classes in the University examinations were snatched away by them. Soon after, Statistics and Geography Departments were opened and a few years later Zoology.

The post-graduate Physical Chemistry laboratory behind the main building was situated in the condemned one-storey building since the time of Acharyya Bose. During the war, the Government took over a major portion of this building and converted it into a big ration-centre storing rice, dal, oil and other such necessities. In 1945 when the war ended, they departed, leaving behind an army of ferocious rats of enormous size. No "Pied Piper" being

available we brought some cats to fight the rat menace. On seeing the rats, the cats fled. So we had to take a drastic step. We introduced chlorine gas for some days and finally got rid of the gnawing rodents. Then there was the four-inch thick greasy dregs and dross on the floor. Two lab-boys, Gopal and Dhanpal and myself had to scrub and clear the floor. The costly and delicate apparatus were all dumped together in a small room for five years. It took six months for me to retrieve the apparatus and make them usable and bring the laboratory to a working condition. Thus we paid the war tax.

In 1946, the great killing, the precursor of Partition, took place. We could not attend college for some days but nothing of the college was harmed in any way. And in 1947, came our Independence and Partition. At that time there were a number of Muslim teachers in this college. Led by Dr. Qudrati Khuda, all of them except one, opted for Pakistan and left. In the opposite flow, the Hindu teachers from Rajshahi, Dacca and Chittagong Colleges came here and some of them were given berth in Presidency College. The Muslim storekeeper of our Chemistry Department opted for Pakistan. He was replaced by a young Dacca P.W.D. Store-Clerk. We had considerable difficulty, as he would not make any distinction between potassium chloride and potassium chlorate, or between magnesium sulphate and manganese oxide.

About this time, the Radhakrishnan Commission for higher education was set up and the members came to Calcutta to visit the colleges, universities etc. I was removed from Presidency College for two weeks and appointed Liaison Officer for the

Commission. This gave me an opportunity of close contact with the Chairman, Dr. Radhakrishnan and with Dr. Zakir Hussain — two future Presidents of India, and of observing with wonder the loftiness of thoughts and ideas of these great men. Guided by me, the Commission visited Presidency College on 14th January, 1949, and was received by Principal Jyotirmoy Ghosh and other senior professors.

The most memorable event of the fifties was the week-long Centenary Celebration of the college in 1955. There was a huge gathering of eminent people of the country in a pandal erected on the grounds of the College. Dr. Rajendra Prasad — the first President of India and an ex-student of the College presided and Sir Jadunath Sarkar inaugurated the function. I was given the charge of organising a Science Exhibition. All the science departments participated. The young lecturers and senior students worked selflessly for weeks. It was a tremendous success. Many top men of the Bar and the Writers' Buildings came to request me to preserve the exhibition. But that was impossible. About an hour before the function started, I approached the President without any previous appointment and requested him to open the science exhibition and unveil a portrait of Acharyya Prafulla Chandra Ghosh. He readily agreed and accompanied me and Principal J. C. Sengupta to the Chemistry Department. There was no picture or photograph of this great savant before and I had had a big portrait made on this occasion.

I had to leave Presidency College reluctantly in 1960 and join the Public Service Commission as a member. Thirty two years have passed, I know

little about the present-day College. I fondly remember my happy days in Presidency College and my beloved students. Many of my students later earned reputations and came to occupy exalted positions in different fields; some were reputed professors or research-directors in this country or abroad, some became vice-chancellors, efficient administrators, eminent engineers or doctors and so on. They achieved these by virtue of their intellect, hard work, devotion and perseverance. I had no contribution in their achievements but I am proud that these men at one time sat around me in my class. I cherish for ever in my heart

the deep love and sincere regard I received from all my students. Many of them, now retired and grey-haired, come to me now and then and we talk of the old golden days at Presidency College.

In 1961 on the occasion of the birth-centenary of Acharyya Roy, I presented a bronze plaque of this great man to the College. The plaque was unveiled by Acharyya Satyendra Nath Bose.

On many idle evenings when I am alone, many incidents of Presidency College come to my mind as if they occurred only yesterday.

Presidency College as seen by an Alumnus and Ex-teacher

Amal Kumar Raychaudhuri

My relation with Presidency College dates back to 1940 when I was admitted as a student in the B.Sc. class with Honours in physics. Two years later, in 1942, I left the college and then after a gap of about twenty years, I came back to the college as professor in 1961. This assignment continued till 1986, but for five more years I was in Presidency College doing research with funds from the University Grants Commission and the Indian National Science Academy. Even now, I have been giving a course of lectures to the students belonging to the recently instituted independent post-graduate class of physics in the college.

It is not easy to write about the events and experiences of the past which are long gone by. For a person like me, who never cared to maintain a diary, there is inevitably some distortion when one tries to recall the events or feelings of the past. There is also a very delicate point in writing one's reminiscences. Should one write the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth? Or should one desist from writing things unpleasant and thus serve a dressed-up account? Perhaps it is uncivil to speak unpleasant truths about respected persons who are no more (men should not war with the dead). But then in writing reminiscences, one is playing the role of some sort of historian, and is it not a crime for a historian to hand down to posterity a deliberately false report of the happenings of his time?

Writing on the occasion of the celebrations of 175 years of the college, it strikes me that in 1942, there was no celebration of the completion of 125 years. True, 1942 was no ordinary year. The Japanese army, along with the INA under Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, were just at the border of India and the Quit India movement gained unparalleled force in the country. Yet, I think that a more important factor was the climate of the time - in those days in Presidency College, there was a too serious, almost a sombre, atmosphere where such celebrations were simply out of the question.

Owing to the demand of the military, the Bengal Engineering College did not admit any new student in 1940 even after going through the process of selection. A number of these students were taken into Presidency College so that our Physics Honours class was somewhat bigger than usual. This made some teachers, specially Professor Snehamoy Dutta, raise their eyebrows. Professor Dutta had a formidable collection of degrees and titles against his name - D.Sc. (London), D.I.C. (London), M.Sc. (Cal), P.R.S. (Cal), F.N.I., etc.

We hardly understood what D.I.C. meant, but a doctorate degree - and that too from London - was enough to make us nervous while attending his classes. At the very first meeting, he told us that physics was a tough subject and expressed his conviction that quite a sizeable part of such a

"large" class must be unfit to pursue the Physics Honours course. He warned us that he would soon take a test to weed out such students. Professor Dutta usually brought a copy of Stirling's *Electricity and Magnetism* with him and, in the class, tried to reproduce from it the diagrams and mathematical calculations on the board. However, he was soon transferred to Rajshahi Government College as principal and we felt relieved that we had not to face the ordeal of an elimination test. But we were unfortunate to have missed an 'eminent educationist' and 'gifted teacher' who 'inspired generations of students by his teaching and researches'.

At that time, the head of the Physics Department was Professor P. C. Mahalanobis, who can rightly be called the father of statistics in India. But at that time we had no idea about the importance of statistics. We, therefore, wondered why our professor was more interested in statistics than in physics and considered it to be a little unfortunate for us. Professor Mahalanobis exuded an originality in everything – in his manners, his appearance and teaching. Indeed, while formally teaching thermodynamics, very often he strayed to topics with little relation to thermodynamics. It might be a lesson on how bias enters into our observations or how diagrams need not be drawn on the board but may be dictated. Proceeding in this way for sometime, he relegated the charge of teaching thermodynamics to one of his research assistants. Initially, he would sit in a chair with the usual smile on his lips while his assistant lectured. It was a very embarrassing situation for the young man and we enjoyed it. After sometime, Professor Mahalanobis

stopped coming to the class and then quite a number of students would tease the young teacher in various ways. In exasperation, he would give the students permission to leave the class after roll-call. Thus on many a day he would find a near-empty class after roll-call.

Professor Kulesh Chandra Kar made a great impression on the students. He was a D.Sc. of Calcutta University and had never been abroad. In his student days, he had some connection with the freedom movement and he invariably used the typical Bengali dress of dhoti and panjabi. He seemed to be very grave and absorbed in thought and found delight in working out long and complicated mathematical problems in detail on the black board. A perfectly suave gentleman, he nevertheless seemed somewhat distant and unapproachable to us. He was distinguished for his researches in acoustics specially on bow-strings, but in later life he was constantly striving to build up theories which would be distinct from the current theories of 'white men' but would nevertheless reproduce their results. It became an obsession with him and an otherwise promising researcher was thereby lost.

After Professor Snehramoy Dutta left, Professor Amarendra Chakraborty came in his place. He brought some fresh air into the department as we could approach him at all times and felt at ease with him. He had his degree from the U. K. (perhaps from Cambridge), but that did not in any way create any barrier between him and us.

In those days, there was strict discipline in the honours classes. The discipline was perhaps based more on fear than on a spontaneous commit-

ment. This was quite apparent from some Chemistry Pass classes where the teachers seemed to be somewhat indulgent.

In these classes, the students gave free rein to the exuberance of youth. However, Mathematics Pass classes were significantly different, perhaps because most of the teachers had a serious attitude.

Political turmoil in the country or events in the outside world usually did not in any way affect the atmosphere in the College. I recall two exceptions. When Subhas Chandra Bose started the movement for the removal of the Holwell Monument, a group of students, apparently from Islamic College, came to Presidency College and tried to disrupt classes. The other instance was the entry of Japan into the war in December, 1941. The College was abruptly closed, our test was dropped and all the students were sent up for the final examination. This left quite a sizeable part of the syllabus uncovered, but in those days hardly anybody talked of completing the Honours syllabus. The syllabus was so beautifully vague !

After about twenty years, in 1961, I came back to the College as a professor. Gone were the days when Presidency College did not admit girl students. Old attitudes had changed - now professors and Principal were become 'beloved' instead of 'respected' or 'revered'. A new phenomenon named 'mass cut' had become fairly common - students *en-bloc* sometimes boycotted their classes. However in one respect, a welcome departure from the past was noticeable. Some students, admittedly few in number, pursued their studies well beyond the syllabi and not unoften

asked questions which were not easy to answer. Teaching in Presidency College had become a challenging job - how far the average teacher could meet this challenge was, of course, a different matter.

Politics now entered the College with a big bang (I have in mind the Naxalite movement). The story is too recent to be analysed right now, but one thing is clear. Presidency College is no longer isolated from the currents and cross-currents of the political world and the students are in no mood to acquiesce in the running of the college by their elders.

Presidency College had a great past - it had produced stalwarts in almost every field. There was a time when the institution was unique both in teaching and research. That day is gone - the leadership in teaching has gone over to the universities and that of research in science has gone to the chain of research institutes that have sprung up since the attainment of Independence. Naturally, a bright young researcher in science finds no attraction for a teacher's post in the college. Matters are made even worse for Presidency College as sooner or later a teacher is inevitably transferred to some other college. The only bright thing now is that still, by and large, the best students of Bengal come to this college. As we all know, the best students of Bengal are some of the best students of India, if not of the whole world. Shall we fail to give them what they deserve ? Shall we bring about the ruin of our country by spoiling these students by providing poor facilities and teachers who are not quite equal to the task ? The future alone will pronounce a judgement on our actions and inactions.

College, Coffee House and Intellectual Trends

Ashin Dasgupta, ex-student and former Head of the Dept. of History, talks to his pupil, Raja Kanta Ray, present Head of the Dept. of History. Uma Dasgupta (nee Ray), ex-student, present. 7 Nov. 1992.

RKR: Ashinda, since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the debate between communism and democracy has practically ceased to engage the students of Presidency College. The debate, I remember, raged hotly in Coffee House when I was a student of the college between 1963-67. Now the student community has shifted its focus from the Coffee House to the college canteen. The canteen, I hear, is preoccupied with a more mundane set of issues. In any case we teachers are not allowed in there.

ADG: We used to frequent the Coffee House.

RKR: So did we, for there was no canteen then. I remember that Amlan Datta was pointed out to me when I first entered Coffee House in 1963. He was pointed out as an intellectual opposed to communism. He headed an intellectual circle there in the 1960s. But the predominant influence among the students then was communism. Do you remember your own student days ?

ADG: I was in college between 1948-51. Amartya Sen, Sukhamay Chakrabarti, Parthasarathi Gupta, Binay Bhushan Chaudhuri and Jyoti Datta were well known Marxist students of

the time. We used to meet in the Coffee House. Our senior Amlan Datta was the anti-Marxist there. I was Amlan Datta's camp follower. Maurice Dobb had just published *Russian Economic Development since the Revolution*. Amlan Datta, I seem to recall, wrote a critique of it, and Dobb made a reply. The Sweezy-Dobb controversy on *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism* had just come out. I remember that the controversy created a stir in the intellectual world of Calcutta.

RKR: Dobb made a written reply to Datta ?

UDG: Let me confirm.

(Uma Dasgupta rings up Amlan Datta. Amlan Datta says it was the other way round. Maurice Dobb reviewed Amlan Datta's study of Soviet economic development and published it in *The Economic Weekly* around 1953. The same magazine also published Amlan Datta's rejoinder).

ADG: I was talking actually of the Coffee House - of the controversies that went on there. There was also another well known figure in the Coffee House. This was Sudhangshu Dasgupta the debater. He used to sit with Amlan Datta. You cannot get a complete picture of the Coffee

House without him.

RKR: All these people sat together in the Coffee House ?

ADG: They would often debate issues together. Both in and out of Coffee House. The atmosphere was one of free and open debate. There was no imposition of views - and no breaking off of conversation simply because views differed.

RKR: Well, in our time liberal democratic opinion was violently repressed. We were manhandled by the Naxalites because we expressed dissent. What was your experience ?

ADG: I remember a debate. A visiting American group was there at the time. Amartya Sen criticised the American position in world affairs during the debate. The house was enthusiastic. Then the opposite group in the debate registered its protest. The house was no less enthusiastic. You will find it in the College Magazine.

RKR: The debate was published there ?

ADG: It was published in the College Magazine which I edited. The debate was related in the Magazine to explain the temper of the College.

RKR: And then ?

ADG: I also published an article in the College Magazine on Barnal. Barnal had said that optimism could not flourish in bourgeois society. His view was that

working men alone could sustain the spirit. I wrote a critical comment on this in the Magazine. If you read it you will see why I describe myself as a camp follower of Amlan Datta.

RKR: A follower, you mean.

UDG: Rajat, you will understand what he means if you bear in mind that the section of the students inclining towards Marxism was influenced by Prof. Susobhan Sarkar. Amlan Datta opposed Susobhan Sarkar intellectually. He went along with Amlan Datta on this.

ADG: Sukhamay Chakrabarti disagreed hotly with what I wrote. But he was open enough to publish my 'Problems of Marxism' in the University magazine *Ekata*. Jyoti Datta, too, condemned my article on Barnal. 'You ought to do a bit of reading and learning' - he said.

RKR: Do you recall anything else of interest ?

ADG: I remember Satyesh Chakrabarti delivering an impassioned speech from the big stairs. He quite impeded our passage. The issue was the influx of the refugees. He urged the students to come out of the Class Rooms and help the refugees. And then there was Jyoti Datta. He explained how wrong it was of the Americans to use the Atom Bomb, but quite all right for the Russians to do so.

RKR: And you ?

ADG: I disagreed.

RKR: The Coffee House controversies seem to belong to an age gone by. When I joined College as a teacher in 1975, the life of the student community centred on the canteen which had been set up around 1970. What was the quality of student life in your own time ?

ADG: Students liked arguing in those days. Argumentation went on

everywhere. Coffee House was a venue. So was the meadow in front of the Baker Laboratory. A meadow bathed in the pleasant sun of the winter. These arguments were as illuminating as anything we learnt in the classroom. We argued on any issue that came up and anywhere. That was what I prized most about the College.

Education—Where are We Going?

Gouri Nag

Presidency College has stepped into its 175th year. The glorious tradition that it has built up over these long years does not merely reflect the story of the progress of a pre-eminent institution, but also symbolizes the history of higher education in our state, its evolution through various stages upto the present time. This, perhaps, is thus a fitting moment for not merely looking back at the past but of taking a sober and objective view of the present, and trying to look into the future clearly and without illusions.

Educationists will tell us that the fundamental purpose of education is all round development of the human mind and imparting certain types of knowledge and skills. But the context and method of education for achieving the above aims, ultimately becomes a matter of subjective value judgment. However, in most educational systems all over the world, authorities appear to have much more limited and specific objectives in view. The British government, for example, is believed to have been guided by a very narrow aim, basically related to the strengthening of British rule, when introducing a system of modern education in India. Ever since Independence, India has been trying hard to break away from the hangover of this "colonial" system of education, and introduce a dynamic and progressive system, which will positively help the economic and social progress of the country.

Great visionaries like Rabindra Nath

and Gandhi had, long before Independence, thought about the role of education and sought to develop a system which should make education meaningful, vital and closely related to the daily lives of the common people. The concepts formulated by them are still considered to be valid by most, but perhaps the time is not yet ripe for their effective application except in isolated cases. The government, both at the centre and at the state level, has in the meanwhile set up a number of commissions and committees, composed of eminent scholars, to provide guidelines for an educational policy suitable for a diverse and complex society like ours.

Many valuable suggestions have been given, and much has been achieved. Progress has been considerable, at least in quantitative terms. Yet we find that educationists and common people are all agreed on one point, that our education system, from top to bottom, is at present in a sorry state. Apart from the well known and oft-repeated complaints of falling standards, indiscipline and declining sense of values, there is the all pervading phenomenon of aimlessness. Not that there has been any lack of effort to determine the most important objectives. The balance has perhaps been tilted on the other side. Too many objectives, some of them contradictory, and ranging from producing a scientific outlook to merely postponing unemployment by a few years - have been sought to be achieved through changes in curriculum and structure of the education system.

What emerges from all this is that providing education with a limited end in view (e.g. producing educated and faithful servants of the British raj), may be less harmful than it seems. As long as the curriculum provides a well-rounded presentation of the major branches of knowledge some basic conception of language and literature and some basic skills, the system always transcends the limited aims of its progenitors. This happens even when the methods of instruction are defective and unscientific. The history of education in Bengal is a remarkable example of this.

Much more serious and disturbing is the influence of religious, social or socio-political doctrines or views on the contents of teaching, and learning. Such influence, to some extent, is unavoidable. A teacher cannot help imparting his beliefs when instructing the students. This could be very dangerous if these beliefs are one sided and narrow, but for the saving grace that the process of a well-rounded education itself provides students with some discernment and power of judging. The situation becomes qualitatively different when particular doctrines tend to influence the curriculum and course content. In our country, the teaching of languages in schools has been partly influenced by an attempt towards national integration through a common language, partly by a strong bias, based on anti-colonial sentiments, against the teaching of English. In recent years there have been accusations and counter-accusations of deliberate tampering with the course content of history text-books for schools. This trend is indeed disquieting. If it continues, it will be the surest way of warping young minds and

doing permanent damage to the cause of progress. Any conscious attempt to close the windows of knowledge, or to provide coloured glasses through which to look at the world, can only be self-destructive in the end. Education becomes all the more sterile and inhibited if attempts are made to concentrate decision and policy-making powers in the hands of people professing to believe in a particular doctrine. Inevitably merit becomes secondary, completing the process of self-destruction.

There is another situation which is equally or even more disquieting. In this case there is not much attempt to indoctrinate young minds. Instead, people at the helm of affairs are frankly opportunist, with an eye only to the main chance. Here the end result is no education at all. These two different types of situation are not mutually exclusive, and their combined operation further complicates the problem. All the committees and commissions have pointed at specific ills and suggested specific remedies consisting of changes in structure, syllabus pattern, course content and the system of teachers' training. Some of these have been put into effect from time to time, yet no significant improvement seems to have taken place. Rather, with the spread of education, quality in general seems to be declining. Thus, instead of rushing forward with more expansion programmes and more "reforms", we should pause and think what we really want to achieve through our education system.

Defining goals ultimately becomes a subjective process, being influenced by our value system. Even, such specific policy decisions like giving more

emphasis to science teaching and less to language teaching in schools, is ultimately based on our value system. I do not know if it may be said, without giving much offence to philosophers, that some values are universally accepted. One may venture a little more and say that the universally accepted goal of education, as stated earlier, is to develop the human mind to the fullest possible extent. The million dollar question is, how should we go about it ?

After forty-five years of Independence, and a number of experiments in the field of education, perhaps we should look back and remember that the system of Western education introduced by the British government could transcend its narrow aim and help to bring about a tremendous cultural upheaval mainly because of two factors. The first was a more or less liberal attitude towards the process of education itself. It is essential that this spirit of liberalism should be revived, not in the shape of so-called "liberal" education, but in the sense that a conscious effort has to be made to ensure objectivity in the presentation of the subject, which should have as much importance as accuracy and clarity. In the same manner, there has to be a conscious shift from abstract theories to applied aspects of education, to ensure a proper balance between the two.

The second important factor was that the system as a whole was geared towards recognition of merit. Teachers, by and large, were selected on the basis of merit and promotions were geared to performance. One important factor contributing to the deterioration of the entire education system is that, according to reports, teachers are often selected and appointed on

considerations other than merit. The system of accountability also appears to have been lost somewhere on the way. There is not much scope for making any headway, unless steps are taken to ensure that the best performers are induced to go in for teaching, are selected strictly on merit, and are given every inducement to continue in the profession, instead of using it as a stepping stone. This is perhaps asking a lot, but the situation is desperate enough to call for drastic remedies. The quality of education depends primarily on the human factor. Once this is put right, it will itself act as a catalytic agent initiating reforms in different fields of education.

Any reference to the quality of teaching usually raises two adverse reactions. The first is that why should teachers be expected to go against the mainstream? The second is, why should the burden of blame for deterioration, if any, in the education system fall on teachers alone ? Both objections are obviously wide of the mark. Even in the most corrupt society there are some people who can rise above their environment and ultimately lead the movement for reform. Nor is there any ground for becoming unduly pessimistic. There are still and great numbers of sound and efficient institutions and many teachers who are excellent by any standard. Since we have definitely left behind the days of laissez-faire, state policy should concentrate on promoting excellence in teaching by all possible means. This by itself will go a long way towards paving the way for other essential reforms. Let us hope that Presidency College, with its rich and wonderful heritage, will play a leading role in working out the ways and means of such a policy.

Not a Placebo

S. P. Mukherjee

It may be contentious to argue that standards of education (particularly at the college or university level) in our country have been on the run down. The charge that the 'quality of teaching in our educational institutions has been deteriorating' may at best invite a dull, defensive debate. I fondly hope that our alma mater Presidency College, which has - like many other institutions of learning - witnessed many vicissitudes in its history so far, continues to belie this charge.

'Quality' is now being talked of, analysed and assessed in relation to a whole array of entities (like materials, processes, products, services, systems and so on) which does not preclude education or performance of educational institutions. Total Quality Management has been implemented in quite a few colleges and universities in the USA and, even in our country, an engineering/management college in the south has of late introduced a Quality Circle. However, we generally tend to indict the intrusion of management techniques (even if these bear the stamp of scientificity) in dealing with educational matters - where quality (in terms of excellence) is more a consequence of creativity fostered in an atmosphere of flexibility, rather than an expected pay off from the rigorous (and not necessarily imaginative) implementation of some rule-based decision(s).

I know that 'quality of teaching' is not amenable to a dissection into elements followed by an integration - as could be the case with materials, products and services. Even then it may not be too unwise to attempt an explanation of this decline in the performance of our

teaching organisations in terms of the famous Ishikawa model of 'quality of working life'. (Readers may please bear with me if I leave the research component in the activities of our institutions for higher education beyond the purview of the present portrayal.) According to this eminent exponent of Japanese Quality Management, the collective performance of any organisation is the net effect of individual performance and resources at the disposal of the organisation. Individual performance - Ishikawa continues to argue - is determined by the individual's ability coupled with his motivation to perform. Probing further into the matter, Ishikawa proposes that an individual's ability to perform is the composite of his knowledge (in the relevant field) and skill (to communicate knowledge to others and/or to translate knowledge into action), while the two components of motivation are attitude (towards the job being performed) and work environment (in terms of organisational culture, peer relations, access to requisite facilities, etc.).

Thus the basic determinants of the performance of an academic institution are knowledge possessed by the teachers (in the subjects/topics they teach rather than the ones in which they specialised), their communicative and interactive skills, their attitude towards the teaching profession *per se* and the teaching they do, the work environment that characterises the institution as well as others which influence or affect the former, and lastly the physical, material and technological resources available to the institution.

I can join many others to counter

Ishikawa (who links components with a product symbol to signify that an absence of one component cannot be compensated at all by excellence in another) and come up with claims that a band of dedicated teachers makes up for scant resources that the profound knowledge of a teacher creates its desired impact on students despite the former's unimpressive delivery of lessons, or that keeping its own house in order even in the midst of a poor surrounding (not physical) is not an impossible task for a college or a university.

My days in Presidency College - as a student and as a teacher - provide me with a better backdrop to appreciate and appraise Ishikawa. The record of excellent performance of this premier institution that has earned global recognition - and that has received short-lived jerks and jolts as well - has been kept up more by individual contributions of some stalwarts than by any superadequacy of resources. Outstanding teachers with their complete commitment to teaching have built up a tradition which excludes anyone with lesser sincerity. I remember a young Chemistry teacher (J. C. Roy if I am right) who was visibly not attracted by teaching and left for an administrative job.

Teachers of Presidency College - barring a few exceptions in our days and, may be, a few more in recent times - have been known for the depth of their knowledge, if not always for their ability to communicate, interact or respond. We hardly bothered about Anil Babu's unimpressive delivery of lessons, once we sensed in him a store-house of knowledge. He would even write out complete answers to questions in our college tests that we had left with incorrect and incomplete responses. Speaking of the attitude towards teaching - reflected in demeanour - I

remember what one of my seniors keeps on saying : even a blind person could identify Tarapada Babu (of English) as a dignified teacher. I would still put on record the fact that as an immature youngster - unable to judge the quality of the content - I used to drink in the fluent, facile and sometimes grandiose talks of teachers like Nanda Babu (of Mathematics) and Rajen Babu (of Physics). I presume that the work environment was by and large congenial but I can assert that teachers were - and hopefully still are - imbued with a zeal to outdo their brethren in other institutions. Am I right in wondering whether some teachers these days fail to give weight to the cult of excellence and credit in the record of Presidency's performance ?

All this can hardly justify a denial of the need for adequate resources - space, teaching aids, libraries and laboratories, museums, an observatory and such others. Inadequate journals, unkempt museums, antique teaching aids, a dysfunctional observatory, unused equipment are further affecting academic excellence. I search for brightness all around. A resource crunch has gripped the country - only to urge us towards better resource management and greater resource mobilisation.

To one who holds the college in high esteem, beholds its present state shorn of its past splendour and lacks direct knowledge into the medley of facts, forms and figures that speak about the College, a few questions remain. What about the work environment now ? What sort of political and bureaucratic interference has been coming in its way to attain greater excellence ? What leadership has the College been providing to usher in reforms in higher education ? Will only inertia in motion keep it moving ?

With a longing, lingering look behind I close this note.

Remembering Professor T. S. Sterling

Biswanath Das (Bursar)

Sometime in the early seventies, Prof. Hiren Mukherjee received an unexpected letter from a British firm : could Prof. Mukherjee provide them with the complete address of one Presidency College of Calcutta ? The Alma Mater was, of course, very much in the heart of Prof. Mukherjee, but not its address ! How many of us know or remember the correct postal address of the great institution ? He simply wrote back: Presidency College, College Street, Calcutta. In a couple of weeks, a fat yellow envelope from a London-based solicitors' firm reached Principal Pratul Mukherjee. Must be the notice of litigation with some Britisher - was the first reaction of a visibly nervous Principal Mukherjee. But as he cut open the flap, out came the last will of an Englishman who had recently died at his home in England ! The perplexed Principal flipped the pages of the immaculately drafted document to discover that the deceased, a former teacher of the College, and who had left the Indian shore nearly half a century ago, had bequeathed a major portion of his estate for the benefit of the poor students of Presidency College, Calcutta. On an immediate impulse, the Principal wrote a letter to 'The Statesman' recording this noble gesture, and this was published as the leading item in the 'Letters to the Editor' column.

And this is how people came to know about this rare act of munificence of Professor T. S. Sterling.

The legacy eventually fetched a

handsome amount of Rs.3,94,300, received by the College authorities in three instalments. This formed the corpus of Prof. T.S. Sterling Poor Students' Fund soon created in the College with Government approval. It is indeed noteworthy that in the long and colourful history of 175 years of the College, no other teacher or associate - Indian or European - has ever shown so much love for its students.

An M.A. of Cambridge University and an M.B.E., Sterling joined the College on 16 October 1909 as Professor of English. He subsequently became the Head of the Department and held the office of the Inspector of European Schools, Bengal, simultaneously for the period July to September, 1920. Upon the creation of the post of Bursar in the College on 12 November, 1915 in order to relieve the Principal of his financial duties, Prof. Sterling held the office for about a year in 1918 (Prof. C.E. Cullis was appointed the first Bursar on 16 September, 1916). He became the officiating Principal from 23 June, 1926, again for about a year, when Principal H.E. Steperton was on leave. Besides, because of his association with the College, he was the Captain of the Calcutta University Training Corps in 1919, and acted for six months in 1921 as its commanding officer. He also became the Secretary, University Students' Bureau in April 1926, a Fellow and member of the Syndicate of Calcutta University. His 19-year long association with the College ended when he joined Hongkong University sometime in 1927 after leaving the

Indian Education Service.

Old-timers, and not-too-old-timers like ourselves, who have had their drilling in English through the erstwhile Intermediate Course of Calcutta University, had an indirect memory of Prof. Sterling as the co-author of a text on Rhetoric and Prosody (Bose & Sterling). As a teacher of English, Prof. Sterling apparently could not cut much ice with his students. Among his favourite students were Prof. Humayun Kabir, Dr. Pratul Gupta and Prof. Hiren Mukherjee. "Extremely youthful looking and always very fashionably dressed, he was a gay person and wanted to be chummy with his students", - recounts Sri Phanibhusan Chakraborty, a former Chief Justice of Calcutta High Court and an old student of Prof. Sterling, "and although he had a good degree and wrote a good style, he did not seem to take his teaching seriously." He had his own views of the spirit in which Indian students should learn English. Indians would benefit from a wide reading rather than an intensive one because they would not be making English Literature a speciality. This probably explains his rather casual method of teaching, restricted to "getting thirty to forty pages of a novel read by the students everyday by calling upon a few of them one after another to read out some paragraphs. As each student read his quota, Professor Sterling would correct his pronunciation of words or articulation of sentences and give such explanations of the text as he thought necessary. But he was generous of praise whenever he thought praise was due."

The income from the "T. S. Sterling Poor Students Fund" created out of the endowment worth Rs.3,94,300 is currently about Rs.25,000 a year. This

will increase to approximately Rs.51,000 a year at the current rate of interest in the year 2003, when a sizeable portion of the corpus (Rs.3,30,600), now invested in RBI loan of relatively lower return, matures. And, as expressly desired by Prof. Sterling in his will, this accrued income stands in very good stead for the financially handicapped students of the College in the form of liberal stipends and grants for tuition and examination fees, purchase of books, and of meeting the cost of educational excursions. It is indeed remarkable that the future Bursars of the College would have to take on themselves the pleasant task of managing for the benefit of the students a legacy left behind by the second Bursar of the institution !

During the pre-independence era, the usual practice of the Indian was to summarily dismiss most foreigners as apathetic, if not antipathetic, to anything that was Indian. During his tenure at Presidency College, Prof. Sterling, predictably enough, did not appear to be particularly fond of the institution. But then, there are more things on heaven and earth than are dreamt of and the heart of man is truly mysterious.

Prof. Sterling's story probably has a deeper implication. His generosity is a measure of the love Presidency College seems to inspire in many of us throughout our lives.

Our respectful homage to the noble soul on the occasion of the 175th anniversary of his beloved Presidency College.

Sources used

1. Presidency College Register, 1927.
2. Presidency College Centenary Commemorative Volume, 1955.
3. Phanibhusan Chakraborty, 'Teaching of English at Presidency College in My Time', Presidency College Magazine, Diamond Jubilee Volume, 1974.

"জননীর দ্বারে আজি ওই...."

অতীচ্ছমোহন গুণ

সেটা ছিল দেশবিভাগের বছর। ১৯৪৭ সাল। পদ্মার ওপারের এক নগায় গ্রাম থেকে কলকাতা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের প্রবেশিকা পরীক্ষায় উত্তীর্ণ হয়ে কলকাতায় পড়তে এলাম। ভর্তি হলাম স্কটিশ চার্চ কলেজের ইন্টারমিডিয়েট আর্টস ক্লাসে। হরতুকি বাগানে স্কটিশ চার্চেরই অগিলভি হস্টেলে থাকতাম। ঐ সময়টা অধ্যক্ষ জন কেলাসের আমল। পড়াশুনা, খেলাধুলো, ক্যাম্পাস ও ইস্টেল - সব মিলিয়ে স্কটিশ তখন খুব ভালো কলেজ। বিশেষ করে গণিত, পদার্থবিদ্যা, রসায়ন শাস্ত্র, দর্শন, অর্থনীতি ইত্যাদি কয়েকটি বিষয়ে স্কটিশে অধ্যাপনার মান তখন বেশ উচুতে। তবে সে-কলেজে লেখাপড়ার সঙ্গে ছিল ছাত্র-রাজনীতির দাপট, আর রাজনীতি-চর্চার সঙ্গে অঙ্গসীভাবে জড়িয়ে ছিল পেশীশক্তির সঞ্চালন।

দু'বছর পর প্রেসিডেন্সিতে বি এ পড়তে এলাম। বেশ আগে থেকেই স্থির করেছিলাম আমার সাম্মানিক বিষয় হবে রাশিবিজ্ঞান। এ-বিষয়টি তখনও নতুন, এ-নিয়ে খুব স্পষ্ট ধারণা ছিল এমন নয়। কিন্তু সে-সময়ে রাশিবিজ্ঞানের পথিকৃৎ অধ্যাপক মহলানবিশের নাম প্রায়ই দৈনিক পত্রিকায় বেরোত। স্কটিশের গণিতাধ্যাপক ডোলানাথ মুখোপাধ্যায়ও মাঝে মাঝে নতুন শাস্ত্রিতে উল্লেখ করতেন। তাছাড়া প্রবীণ ছাত্র কাণ্টীশ মাইতি অগিলভি হস্টেলে থেকে বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের স্নাতকোত্তর ক্লাসে পড়তেন। গণিতের স্নাতকোত্তর ছাত্র এবং আরো পরে গণিতের অধ্যাপক হয়েছিলেন তিনি কিন্তু কিছুদিন বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের স্নাতকোত্তর রাশিবিজ্ঞান বিভাগে তিনি ক্লাস করেছেন। তাঁর কথা শুনেও নতুন বিষয়টি সম্পর্কে কৌতুহলী হয়েছিলাম।

প্রেসিডেন্সির অন্য সব বিজ্ঞান-বিভাগের তুলনায় রাশিবিজ্ঞান বিভাগের অবস্থাটা ছিল অনেক দীন। অধ্যাপকের সংখ্যা অত্যন্ত, কলেজ গ্রাহণারে রাশিবিজ্ঞানের বইপত্রও ছিল অতি সামান্য সংখ্যায়। আর পদার্থবিদ্যা বিভাগের যে অংশটি ইতিহাস

স্ট্যাটিস্টিক্যাল ইনিস্টিটিউটের ব্যবহারে ছিল তার মধ্যে তিনটে ছোট কুঠুরী বানিয়ে রাশিবিজ্ঞানের অধ্যাপকদের কসার জায়গা এবং প্র্যাকটিক্যাল ক্লাসের ব্যবস্থা হয়েছিল। রাশিবিজ্ঞানের লেকচারগুলি দেওয়া হত অন্য কয়েকটি বিভাগের ঘরগুলিতে। তারও যে খুব নির্দিষ্ট একটা ব্যবস্থা ছিল এমন নয়। কোনো লেকচার হল পদার্থবিদ্যা বিভাগে, কোনোটি বা রসায়ন বিভাগে, আবার কোনোটির জন্যে হয়তো ভূত্ব বিভাগে ছুতে হল। (আমরা বি এ / বি এস সি পাশ করে বেরোনোর বছর চারেক পর বিভাগ তার নিজস্ব জায়গা বেকার ল্যাবরেটরির তেলার পূর্ব প্রাণ্টে উঠে আসে।)

কিন্তু বিভাগে অধ্যাপনার উৎকর্ষের ফলে স্থানভাব, অধ্যাপকের সংখ্যালঠা বা বইপত্রের সংখ্যালঠা আমাদের মধ্যে ইন্মন্যুটার সঞ্চার করতে পারে নি। রাশিবিজ্ঞানের প্রধান অধ্যাপক শ্রী অনিলকুমার ভট্টাচার্য গবেষক হিসাবে তখনই বেশ খ্যাতি অর্জন করেছেন। পরবর্তীকালে গবেষণার পরিবর্তে অধ্যাপনায় অধিকতর মনোনিবেশ করলেও তাঁর কিছু গবেষণা-কর্ম পাঠ্যপুস্তকেও স্থানলাভ করেছে। অধ্যাপক বীরেন্দ্রনাথ ঘোষ ছিলেন অনিলকুমার মতোই নিষ্ঠাবান শিক্ষক কিন্তু রাশিবিজ্ঞানের দ্ব্যাখ্যাতা হিসেবে তাঁর স্থান ছিল অনিলকুমার উর্ধ্বে। পারিসংখ্যানিক পদ্ধতিগতির যৌক্তিক বা তাদের প্রায়োগিক দিক নিয়ে তাঁর ব্যাখ্যান আমাদের ধ্যানধারণাকে স্বচ্ছতর করেছে। নবীনতর অধ্যাপক প্রসাদকুমার বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায় ও ডেমনস্ট্রেটর সমরকুমার ধর অধ্যাপক ভট্টাচার্য ও ঘোষের সুযোগ্য সহকর্মী হিসেবে কাজ করেছেন। বিভাগের একমাত্র অফিসকর্মী ছিলেন দেবেন্দ্রনাথ রায়, মাত্র বছর দুই আগে তিনি অবসর নিয়েছেন।

বলা প্রয়োজন যে রাশিবিজ্ঞানের ক্লাসের তুলনায় বাংলা মাত্তোষার ক্লাসে বা পাস স্তরের ইংরেজি বা গণিতের ক্লাসে বসেই বেশি করে উপলব্ধি করতাম যে

প্রেসিডেন্সির ছাত্র বলে আমি কিছু বিরল সৌভাগ্যের অধিকারী । সুযোগ্য খ্যাতিমান অধ্যাপক আর সপ্রতিভি, দীপ্তিমান সতীর্থদের সাহচর্য আমার জ্ঞানবুদ্ধিকে পরিগত করেছে, বিভিন্ন প্রমের ভালোমন্দ বিচারের ক্ষমতাকে তীক্ষ্ণতর করেছে, সাহিত্য-সঙ্গীত-শিল্প সম্পর্কে আমার উপলব্ধিকে খানিকটা পরিশীলিত করেছে । স্কটিশের মতো প্রেসিডেন্সি কলেজেও রাজনীতি-চর্চা হয়েছে । কিন্তু এক্ষেত্রেও আলোচনা-তর্ক সবই ছিল বুদ্ধিদীপ্ত । বাগবিত্তও থাকলেও কৃচিং পেশীশক্তির প্রকাশ দেখা গেছে ।

প্রেসিডেন্সির ছাত্র ছিলাম বস্তুত ১৯৪৯ থেকে ১৯৫১ এই দুর্বছর । অবশ্য পরের দুর্বছর কলেজের ছাত্রাবাস ও গ্রন্থাগারের স্থাবিধে নেবার জন্যে বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের স্নাতকোত্তর ক্লাসে পড়েছি এ কলেজেরই মাধ্যমে । ১৯৫৩-র শেষে এম এ / এম এস-সি পরীক্ষা হল, ফল বেরোবার পর প্রায় দুর্বছর বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের রাশিবিজ্ঞান বিভাগে আমি গবেষক-ছাত্র ছিলাম । তারপর ১৯৫৬-র জানুয়ারিতে অধ্যাপনার কাজ নিয়ে ফিরে এলাম আমার কলেজ প্রেসিডেন্সিতেই । এভাবে প্রেসিডেন্সি কলেজের সঙ্গে প্রায় সাড়ে চার দশক ধরে নিবিড় বন্ধনে জড়িয়ে আছি । সে-বন্ধন জননী-জাতকের বন্ধনের মতোই অনপনেয়, অনন্ধীকার্য-অনেক পরিমাণেই কাঞ্চিত ।

প্রেসিডেন্সির পূর্বতন রূপ হিস্বু কলেজের ১৭৫ বছর পূর্তি অনুষ্ঠানে আমি আমার অধ্যাপক ও সতীর্থদের স্মৃতিচিহ্নে স্মরণ করি । তাঁদের অনেকে লোকান্তরিত । সতীর্থদের অনেকে দেশের নানাস্থানে বা বিদেশে ছড়িয়ে আছেন । তাঁরা আজ এখানে ফিরে এলেও পুরোন পরিমণ্ডল ফিরে আসবে না । আমার শিক্ষক-জীবনের প্রথম দিকে যাঁরা এখানে আমার সহকর্মী হিলেন তাঁদের অনেকেই এখন অবসর নিয়েছেন, মৃত্যুর মধ্য দিয়েও অনেকে অপসৃত ।

বিশেষ কোনো ছাত্র বা বিশেষ কোনো শিক্ষকের গুণবত্তা নিয়ে এখানে বিশদ আলোচনার সার্থকতা দেখি না । বরং পঞ্চাশের দশকের প্রথমদিকে কলেজটা কেমন ছিল আর এখন কেমন হয়েছে তা নিয়ে একটা তুলনামূলক আলোচনা করা যেতে পারে ।

আমাদের সময়ে আই এ বা আই এস-সি পরীক্ষায়

উচ্চশ্বানাধিকারী বেশ কিছু ছেলেমেয়ে প্রেসিডেন্সির ডিগ্রী ক্লাসে ভর্তি হত । অন্যদিকে এখন যারা এ-কলেজে পড়তে আসে তাদের মধ্যে উচ্চমাধ্যমিক বা তার সমতুল পরীক্ষায় উচ্চশ্বানাধিকারীদের সংখ্যা অত্যুল । এমন ছাত্রছাত্রী আজকাল বিজ্ঞান, কলা বা বাণিজ্য শাখায় উচ্চতর বিদ্যার্জনে সাধারণত আগ্রহী হয় না । বরং তাদের ভিড় দেখা যায় আই আই টি-তে বা ইঞ্জিনীয়ারিং বা মেডিক্যাল শিক্ষার কলেজগুলিতে । কিন্তু এখনও বিজ্ঞান বা কলা শাখায় যারা বিদ্যার্জনে আগ্রহী এমন ছেলেমেয়েদের মধ্যে সর্বোত্তমরা সাধারণত প্রেসিডেন্সিতেই পড়তে আসে ।

আমরা যখন প্রেসিডেন্সিতে পড়তে এলাম, তার মাত্র পাঁচ বছর আগে (১৯৪৪-এ) কলেজের দরজা মেয়েদের জন্যে খুলে দেয়া হয়েছে । হিন্দু কলেজের সময় থেকে অন্য কিছু পরিবর্তন সত্ত্বেও এ-কলেজ ছিল সম্পূর্ণত নারীবর্জিত । আমাদের সময়েও স্নাতকনিম্ন ও স্নাতকোত্তর উভয় প্রতিয়ে বারো শ' ছাত্রছাত্রীর মধ্যে ছাত্রীদের সংখ্যা এক শ'র বেশি ছিল না । তারপর অবশ্য ছাত্রীদের আনুপাতিক সংখ্যা ক্রমশ বেড়েই চলেছে । মোট বিদ্যার্থি-সংখ্যা বেড়ে এখন পনেরো শ' ছাত্রিয়ে গেছে, কিন্তু ছাত্রীদের সংখ্যা বেড়েছে অনেক দুর্বতর হারে । এখন তো বিদ্যার্থীদের শতকরা ৫৫ জনই ছাত্রী । দর্শন, ইংরেজি বা বাংলা সাহিত্য, ইতিহাস, সমাজতত্ত্ব বা ভূগোলের ক্লাসে হয়তো দেখা যাবে একটি বা দুটি বালক কোনোমতে পুরুষজাতির পতাকা বহন করছে । আর রাষ্ট্রবিজ্ঞান বা জীবন-বিজ্ঞানের নানা শাখায়ও ছাত্রীদের আনুপাতিক হার শতকরা ৬০-৭৫ এ দাঁড়িয়েছে । আরও বিশ্বয়ের ব্যাপার, আমাদের বছর তিনেক প্রতি রাশিবিজ্ঞানে কোনো ছাত্রী ভর্তি হত না, কিন্তু এখন তাঁদের সংখ্যা ক্রমবর্ধমান । বস্তুত পদার্থবিদ্যার শতকরা ১০টি, গণিত ও রসায়ন শাস্ত্রের ৪০টি, অর্থনীতি ও রাশিবিজ্ঞানের ৪৫টি আসন এখন মেয়েদের দখলে । পরীক্ষাতেও এখন তাঁরা খুব ভালো ফল করছে । কয়েকটি বিষয়ে তো ছাত্রীদের সাফল্য চমকপ্রদ ; রাশিবিজ্ঞানও এ-গোষ্ঠীতে পড়ে ।

আমাদের সঙ্গে সাম্মানিক রাশিবিজ্ঞানে কোনো মেয়ে না থাকলেও বাংলা মাতৃভাষা এবং গণিত ও ইংরেজি পাস ক্লাসে অন্য সাম্মানিক বিষয়ের ছাত্রীরা

ছিল । সাধারণত তারা সামনের দিকে আলাদা কয়েকটি বেঁকে বসত । খাস কলকাতার কিছু স্মার্ট ছেলে ছাড়া অন্য কেউ তাদের কাছে দ্বেষ্ট না । কিন্তু মেয়েদের সঙ্গে তাদেরও কথাবার্তা হত 'আপনি' সম্মোধনে । সম্মোধন 'আপনি' থেকে 'তুমি'তে নেমে এলে বোবা যেত দুজনের অন্তরঙ্গতা হয়েছে ; অরু কয়েকটি ক্ষেত্রে সে-অন্তরঙ্গতা প্রায় ও শেষে পরিণয়ের রূপ নিয়েছিল ।) বি এ ঙ্লাসে ছাত্র ছিলাম ১৯৪৯ থেকে ১৯৫১ পর্যন্ত । ১৯৫৬-র গোড়ায় কলেজে পড়াতে এসে দেখলাম সাম্বানিক রাশিবিজ্ঞানেও কয়েকজন ছাত্রী রয়েছে, আর ইতিমধ্যেই সম্মোধনে 'আপনি'-র পরিবর্তে 'তুমি' চালু হয়ে গেছে । তবে তখনও ঙ্লাসে মেয়েরা ছেলেদের থেকে একটু দূরুষ রেখে - হয়তো ভিন্ন বেঁকে - বসত । ১৯৬২ থেকে ১৯৬৫ পর্যন্ত স্টাডি লীভ নিয়ে মার্কিন দেশে ছিলাম । সেখান থেকে ফিরে দেখলাম কলেজে ছেলেমেয়েদের সম্পর্কে ছোটখাট বিপ্লব ঘটে গেছে ! সম্মোধনে তখন 'তুমি'-র পরিবর্তে 'তুই' স্থান পেয়েছে, আর ঙ্লাসে ছেলেরা-মেয়েরা মিলে বেশ দ্বেষ্যাধীন করে বসছে ! বলা দরকার যে আমি এ-পরিবর্তনকে স্বাগত করি । বর্তমানকালে বিশ্ব জুড়ে নারীমুক্তির যে-হাওয়া বইছে তার সঙ্গে তাল রেখেই এ-পরিবর্তন ঘটছে । এর ফলে নারী-পুরুষের সম্পর্ক অনেক সহজ হয়েছে এটাও স্বীকার করতে হবে ।

সে যা-ই হোক, ষাটের দশকের মধ্যভাগ পর্যন্ত প্রেসিডেন্সি কলেজে বিদ্যাচার্চার একটি আদর্শ পরিমণ্ডল বজায় ছিল । সে-দশকের শেষভাগে এক ধরনের রাজনীতিক আন্দোলনের ঘাত-প্রতিঘাতে কলেজের ক্যাম্পাস উত্তোল হয়ে উঠল । এর ফল হিসেবে একজন অধ্যক্ষ অকালে অবসর নিলেন ; দুজন আতঙ্কিত হয়ে সে-পদ ছেড়ে অধ্যাপকের পদে ফিরে গেলেন ; প্রবীণ অধ্যাপকদের মধ্যেও কয়েকজন অন্য শিক্ষা-প্রতিষ্ঠানে চলে গেলেন । সে আন্দোলনের তরুণ-নায়ক এখন মধ্যবয়সী, কয়েক বছর আগে 'দেশ' সাংস্থানিকের একটি সংখ্যায় দাবী করেছেন যে তাঁদের আন্দোলনের একটি সুরুল - প্রেসিডেন্সি এখন জনগণের কাছাকাছি এসে গেছে ।

এ-দাবীর এমন অর্থ করা যেতে পারে যে পূর্বকালে প্রেসিডেন্সির ছাত্র-শিক্ষকরা (বিশেষ করে শিক্ষকরা) গজদন্ত-মিনারে বাস করতেন - এখন তাঁরা মাটির

কাছাকাছি নেমে এসেছেন । একদিক থেকে এটা ঠিক । পূর্বে এখানকার অধ্যাপকদের মধ্যে যে ম্বারি লক্ষিত হত - বিশেষ ইংরেজি, ইতিহাস বা অর্থনীতির মতো বিষয়ের অধ্যাপকদের মধ্যে - এখন তা অনেক পরিমাণেই অন্তর্হিত । বস্তুত, প্রথম জীবনে ম্ব ছিলেন, অরু কথা সাধারণত কাটাকাটা ইংরেজি বা বাংলায় বলতেন, সাধারণ ছাত্রশিক্ষকদের থেকে একটা দূরুষ রেখে চলতেন, কিন্তু পরবর্তী জীবনে সাধারণ ইংরেজি বা বাংলায় কথা বলেন, পূর্বতন ব্রাত্যদের সঙ্গে দাদা বা ভাইয়ের সম্পর্ক স্থাপন করেছেন এমন কিছু অধ্যাপকের নামোন্নেখ করা যায় । এঁদের অনেকেই কিন্তু ম্বারির সঙ্গে প্রগতিশীলতার (এমন কি মার্সীয় প্রগতিশীলতার) একটা সমন্বয় সাধন করেছিলেন । তাই সমকালীন সমাজ সম্পর্কে তাঁরা আগে উদাসীন ছিলেন, এখন নয় - এমন বলা কি ঠিক হবে ?

এই রাজনীতিক নেতা যদি বুঝিয়ে থাকেন যে এখন গ্রামের বা গরীব ঘরের ছেলে-মেয়েদের পক্ষে প্রেসিডেন্সিতে পড়তে পারা সহজতর হয়েছে, তা হলেও ভুল করা হবে । গত দেড়-দুই দশকের বিভিন্ন সময়ে কলেজে কয়েকটি সমীক্ষা হয়েছে, এর প্রতিটির সঙ্গেই আমি কোনো-না-কোনো ভাবে যুক্ত ছিলাম । দেখা যাবে প্রেসিডেন্সির বর্তমান খোলা ভর্তি-নীতি সত্ত্বেও এখানে যারা তুকতে পারছে তাদের মধ্যে কলকাতাবাসী বিভিন্ন পরিবারের ছেলেমেয়েদের আনুপাতিক সংখ্যা ক্রমবর্ধমান । (কেউ বলবেন, এর কারণ কলেজের ভর্তির পরীক্ষায় ইংরেজি-জ্ঞানের উপর অব্যাক্ত গুরুস্বারূপ । আবার অন্য কেউ বলবেন, গ্রামের স্কুল এবং শহরের বাংলা মাধ্যমের স্কুল থেকে লেখাপড়ার পাঠ অনেক পরিমাণে উঠে যাওয়ার ফলেই এমনটি ঘটছে ।)

রাজনীতিক নেতা যদি বুঝিয়ে থাকেন যে পঠন-পাঠনের যে উৎকর্ষ আগে প্রেসিডেন্সির গর্ব ছিল সে-উৎকর্ষের অনেকখানি অপক্ষে ঘটেছে - প্রেসিডেন্সির মান রাজ্যের আর দশটা কলেজের মানের কাছাকাছি নিয়ে আসা সম্ভব হয়েছে, তা হলে অবশ্য আমাদের খুব একটা প্রতিবাদ করার থাকে না ।

আমি যখন ফটিশ চার্ট কলেজ থেকে প্রেসিডেন্সিতে পড়তে এলাম (গ্রামের সৌন্দা মাটির

গুরু হয়তো তখনও গায়ে লেগে আছে), সে-সময়ে স্কটিশ কলকাতার অন্যতম সেরা কলেজ । কিন্তু প্রেসিডেন্সিতে দুকেই বুঝতে পারলাম পঠন-পাঠনের উৎকর্ষে এ-কলেজের স্থান স্কটিশের অনেক উর্ধ্বে । বিশেষ করে বাংলা বা ইংরেজির ক্লাসে বসলে এ-তফাঁটা বোঝা যেত । আমাদের বাংলা পড়িয়েছেন অধ্যাপক জনার্দন চক্রবর্তী, কালীপদ সেন, হরপ্রসাদ মিত্র ও কুদিরাম দাশ । ইংরেজির ক্লাসগুলো নিতেন অধ্যাপক সুবোধচন্দ্র সেনগুপ্ত, তারাপদ মুখোপাধ্যায়, প্রবাদপ্রতিম তারকনাথ সেন, কালীপদ দাশগুপ্ত, সুবীত কুমার ইন্দ্র ও প্রিয়তোষ বাগচী । অল্পদিনের জন্যে পেয়েছিলাম অধ্যাপক সোমনাথ মৈত্রে ও দিলীপকুমার সেন-কে । (অধ্যাপক তারকনাথ সেন পড়াতেন খুবই উচ্চ মানে । পাস ক্লাসে পড়াছেন, সে-কথাটা মনে থাকত না । তাই সামানিক ছাত্রদের কাছে যতটা বিশদ ব্যাখ্যার দরকার অনেকাংশে ততটাই করতেন আমাদের কাছেও । ফলে পরীক্ষা উত্তরণে তাঁর পড়ানো তেমন কাজে লাগে নি । কিন্তু কলেজের পরীক্ষায় খাতার মার্জিনে খুঁটিনাটি বিষয় নিয়ে তাঁর মন্তব্যগুলি আমাদের খুবই সহায় হত । আমার মতো অনেকেরই ইংরেজি ভাষার উপর অধিকার এর ফলে খানিকটা মজবুত হয়েছে । পরে তাঁর ভগ্নাবস্থা ও কলেজের রুটিনমাফিক কাজের চাপ সত্ত্বেও স্বতঃপ্রবৃত্ত হয়ে আমার মতো কয়েকজন এম এ-র ছাত্রকে তিনি আই এ এস পরীক্ষার জন্যে টিউটোরিয়ালের মাধ্যমে তৈরি হতে সাহায্য করেছেন । সেখানেও কোনো বিষয়ে প্রবন্ধ লিখতে দিয়ে খাতার মার্জিনে তিনি যেসব মন্তব্য লিখতেন তা হয়তো ভাষা সংস্কৰণে আমাদের আস্থাতুষ্টিকে নাড়া দিয়েছে । কিন্তু আমাদের ভুল ইংরেজি ও শুরু ইংরেজি, ভালো ইংরেজি ও খারাপ বা চলনসই ইংরেজির মধ্যে প্রত্যেকে করার ক্ষমতা এর ফলে দৃঢ়তর হয়েছে । আমার মনে হয় তাঁর ছাত্র হতে পেরে এটাই আমাদের বড়ো প্রাপ্তি ।) গণিতের ক্লাসে বসে প্রেসিডেন্সি ও স্কটিশের মধ্যে এই ফারাকটা তেমন বোধ করতাম না, কারণ স্কটিশে আমরা পড়েছি তোলানাথ মুখোপাধ্যায়, নরেন্দ্রকৃষ্ণ কারফর্মা, মধুসূন সরকারের মতো গণিত-অধ্যাপকের কাছে । অনেক দিক থেকেই তাঁরা ছিলেন প্রেসিডেন্সির অধ্যাপক ভূপেন্দ্রচন্দ্র দাশ, গুরুদাস ভড়, দেবেন্দ্রনাথ মিত্র বা উপেন্দ্রনাথ সেনের সমকক্ষ । অবশ্য

প্রেসিডেন্সিতে অধ্যাপক বিভূতিভূষণ সেনের কাছে পড়ে বুঝেছি গণিতের মতো বিষয়কেও উপযুক্ত শিক্ষক কতখানি মনোগাহী করে তুলতে পারেন । তিনি ছিলেন সম্পূর্ণ ভিন্ন গোত্রের অধ্যাপক ! (ঠিক সমর্পণয়ের এক অধ্যাপককে মার্কিন দেশে পি-এইচ-ডি করার সময় পেয়েছিলাম - অঙ্কার ওয়েসলার, আমাদের মিতিত্ব অর্ধাং measure theory পড়াতেন তিনি ।)

আমার মনে হয় ঘাটের দশকের প্রায় শেষ অবধি প্রেসিডেন্সিতে অধ্যাপনার এই উৎকর্ষ অস্থান ছিল । তারপর থেকে প্রথমে নকশালবাড়ি আন্দোলনের ঘড়-ঘাপ্টা, পরে কর্তাব্যজ্ঞিদের কিছু অদূরদর্শী নীতির ফলে অধ্যাপনার মান ক্রমশ নেমে গেছে । মঙ্গুরি কমিশনের বিষেষ অনুদানকে সম্বল করে গোটা দুই বিভাগ তাদের গবেষণা কর্ম ও অধ্যাপনার উচ্চমান অক্ষুণ্ণ রাখতে পেরেছে । বাকি সব বিভাগের মানে অধোগমন ঘটেছে । এ-ধারা বজায় থাকলে প্রেসিডেন্সির কোনো বিভাগ আর কলকাতার অন্য দশটা কলেজের সমবিষয়ের বিভাগের মধ্যে অধ্যাপনার মানে বৈষম্য অঠিরেই ঘূঁচে যাবে এমন মনে করা যেতে পারে । বস্তুত, বেশ কয়েকটি বিষয়ে আজকাল প্রেসিডেন্সির তুলনায় নরেন্দ্রপুর রামকৃষ্ণ মিশন আবাসিক কলেজ বা সেন্ট জেভিয়ার্স বা ব্র্যাবোর্ন -বেথনুরের পরীক্ষার ফল বেশি সন্তোষজনক হয় । আমি নিজে প্রেসিডেন্সিতে পড়েছি পড়িয়েছি ত্রিশ বছরের অধিক কাল । তাই এই অধোগমন উপলব্ধি করতে পারি । কেউ কেউ অবশ্য বলছেন, শিক্ষক-মণ্ডলীতে সাম্প্রতিককালে যেসব পরিবর্তন সাধিত হয়েছে, তার ফলে পরীক্ষায় ছাত্রছাত্রীদের ক্রতিস্থে অবনতি নয়, উন্নতিই লক্ষিত হচ্ছে । সম্পূর্ণ পারিসংখ্যানিক দৃষ্টিতে দেখলে মনে হতে পারে যে পরীক্ষায় প্রেসিডেন্সির ছাত্রছাত্রীদের ক্রত্কার্যতায় তেমন কোনো হ্রাস ঘটে নি । সামানিক ডিগ্রী প্রাপ্ত ছাত্রছাত্রীদের সংখ্যা বা প্রথম শ্রেণীতে উত্তীর্ণ ছাত্রছাত্রীদের সংখ্যা হয়তো তেমন মন্দ নয় । কিন্তু অনেক ছেলেমেয়েই যে দিনের পর দিন ক্লাসে অনুপস্থিত থাকে, কোচিং ক্লাস সিয়ে বা গৃহশিক্ষকের সাহায্য নিয়ে পরীক্ষার জন্যে তৈরি হয় - একথাটা কি অস্বীকার করা যাবে ?

অধ্যাপনার মানের উন্নতি বা অবনতি বিচার করা ছাত্রাত্মাদের পক্ষে কঠিন কাজ, কারণ তারা বর্তমানকে পাছে, অতীত কেমন ছিল সে - সবক্ষে অভিজ্ঞতা সংযোগ তাদের পক্ষে সত্ত্ব নয়। তবে কলেজে বিতর্ক-সভা অনুষ্ঠিত হয় না বলা চলে, আর অনুষ্ঠিত হলেও সেখানে ছাত্রাত্মাদের উপস্থিতির হার উদ্যোগা এবং বক্তা উভয়ের লজ্জার কারণ হয়। এককালের বর্ণাচাৰী রবীন্দ্র পরিষদের কোনো অনুষ্ঠানই হয় না, হয়তো বা সারা বছরে একটি কবিসমেলনের মধ্য দিয়ে পরিষদ তার দায়িত্ব পালন করে। কলেজ ম্যাগাজিনে যেসব গল্প-কবিতা-প্রবন্ধ প্রকাশিত হয় তার অধিকাংশই প্রায় অপাঠ্য। এসবের মধ্যেই কলেজের সাম্প্রতিক ব্যাধির পরিচয় পাওয়া যায়।

আশির দশকের প্রথম দিকে আমরা কয়েকজন সীমিত শক্তি নিয়ে এই অধোগমন রোধের চেষ্টা করে-ছিলাম। সে-প্রয়াসকে অবশ্য কোনো কোনো মহল রাজনীতিক বিরোধিতা বলে চিহ্নিত করেছেন। প্রেসিডেন্সি কলেজ আমাদের মাতৃস্বরূপ। মাঝের দুঃখ-লাঙ্ঘনা নিরসনে আমরা আন্তরিক উদ্যোগ নিয়েছিলাম এ-কথাটা ভেবে পৌরব বোধ করি। সে-উদ্যোগ অনেকাংশে নিষ্ফল হয়েছে ঠিক কথা, কিন্তু সমস্যার রূপটি পশ্চিমবঙ্গবাসী বা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় মণ্ডিরি

কমিশনের মতো সংস্থার কাছে আমরা স্পষ্ট করে তুল ধরতে পেরেছি। আশা করা যায় উপমুক্ত সময়ে তাঁরা যথাযথ ব্যবস্থা গ্রহণ করে অবস্থার উন্নতি সাথে প্রয়াসী হবেন।

কোনো শিক্ষা-প্রতিষ্ঠানে সুষ্ঠু অধ্যয়ন-অধ্যাপনার ঐতিহ্য গড়ে তুলতে কয়েক ফুল কেটে যায়। আমাদের চারদিকে যে নতুন বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়গুলি গড়ে উঠেছে তাদের দিকে তাকালেই এ-কথার যাথার্থ্য স্পষ্ট হবে। সেক্ষেত্রে প্রেসিডেন্সির মতো সেরা, ঐতিহ্যমণ্ডিত বিদ্যালয়কে নষ্ট হতে দিলে জাতির পক্ষে তা পরম ক্ষতি ও লজ্জার কারণ হবে। এ-ব্যাপারে কলেজের প্রাক্তন ছাত্রাত্মী ও অধ্যাপকমণ্ডলীর বিশেষ দায়িত্ব রয়েছে বলে মনে করি। কলেজের ১৭৫ বছর পূর্ব অনুষ্ঠান উপলক্ষে তাঁদের উদ্দেশে বলা যায় -

"জননীর দ্বারে আজি ওই শুন গো শঙ্খ বাজে।
থেকো না থেকো না, ওরে ভাই, মগন মিথ্যা কাজে॥
অর্য ভরিয়া আনি ধর গো পূজার থালি
রতন-প্রদীপখানি যতনে আনো গো জ্বালি
ভরি লয়ে দুই পার্বণ বহি আনো ফুলডালি
মার আহ্মানবাণী রঁটাও ভুবন মাঝে॥"

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