

# Hindu or Presidency College : A Collage of Government Records

Ladli Mohon Raychaudhury\*

This paper seeks to relate the history of how the Presidency College came into being. The story is to be traced from an account of the Hindu College, to which adequate reference has been made in a very early series of government records - *Papers relating to the establishment of the Presidency College of Bengal*. The series contains three papers, no. 13, 14 & 17, all bound together in a single volume. In the Appendix VI of this combined volume the history of the Hindu College was told by F.J. Mouat, the then Secretary to the Council of Education, Government of Bengal. Briefly speaking the story is as follows.

Eminent Indians and Europeans at first thought it necessary that an advanced centre of learning should be established for the tuition of sons of *respectable* Hindu parents in the English and Indian languages including European and Asiatic sciences and literature. David Hare persuaded Sir Edward Hyde East, then Chief Justice of Bengal, to take initiative in the matter. The Chief Justice agreed and accordingly the first public meeting for the establishment of the proposed Hindu college was held at his residence on 01.5.1816. Thereafter at the second meeting held on 21.5.1816, a committee for the proposed college was appointed. The committee consisted of the following members :

Sir E. H. East, President	Lieutenant W. Price
J. H. Harrington, Vice-President	D. Hare
W. C. Blacquiere	Gopeemohun Deb
Capt. J. W. Taylor	Joy Kissen Sing
H. H. Wilson	Ramtunoo Mullick
N. Walich	Obhoy Churn Banerjee
	Ramdoolal Dey
	Rajah Ramchand

Capt. T. Roebuck	Hureemohun Thakoor
Lieutenant F. Irvine	Ramgopal Mullick
Chatoorbhooj Nyaruttun	Baishnodboss Mullick
Suobramonee Sastree	Choytur Churn Seet
Mirtunjoy Biddalunkar	Shib Chunder Mookerjee
Rugoomonee Biddabhoosun	Radhacant Deb
Gopeemohun Thakoor	Ramruttun Mullick
	Calisunker Ghosal

The first meeting of the said committee was held on 27.5.1816 where it was decided to call the new institution the "Maha Pathshala or Hindoo College of Calcutta", of which "the primary object was declared to be the tuition of the sons of respectable Hindoos, in English and Indian languages, and in the literature and science of Europe."

At a subsequent meeting held on 11.6.1816, the European members withdrew from an active participation in the management of the college desiring only to be considered as private friends to the scheme. By December 1816, the first Managing Committee of the College was constituted at the house of Sir E. H. East. The committee consisted of Baboo Gopee Mohun Thakur who was to become Governor, and four Directors, i.e., Gopee Mohun Deb, Joy Kissen Sing, Radha Madub Banerjee and Gunganarain Doss.

The school appears to have been first held in a house hired at eighty rupees a month in the Chitpore Road, and to have been opened on the 20th January 1817. Twenty scholars were present on that occasion and English, Bengali and Persian were the languages taught.

Mouat has summed up his account with the following comments contained in paragraph 77

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of the text. "From that history", Mouat comments :

"it undoubtedly appears that the Hindoo College was originally a private or rather a class institution, designed as a school for conveying English learning to Hindoos of the higher classes exclusively; that as the school rose in usefulness and popularity, the endowments made by its liberal and benevolent founders diminished as they were by the loss consequent on an unfortunate investment, were found to be quite insufficient for its objects; that thereupon, Government at the desire of all parties interested in the welfare of the institution, adopted it, devoting the whole proceeds of the endowment to scholarships, and defraying at a heavy annual charge the whole cost of the establishment; and that, in consequence of that adoption and support, and of the ever increasing favor with which the Hindoo community have regarded the institution, what was in its original state, and so long as it remained in private hands, a small school with a very uncertain prospect of longevity, has grown into the most flourishing college in India. This success, however, does not appear to the Council to be due to the exclusive character of the College; and still less is it due to the system of management which is positively an evil."

The need was, therefore, felt for opening a new centre of learning where pupils belonging to different faiths can be admitted. The decline of Calcutta Madrasah (since 1850) where the Muslims used to receive higher education and in which the English Department was almost defunct, made it further necessary to solve the problem on a priority basis. In a letter (No. 1348 dated Fort William the 4th August 1853) written to Cecil Beadon, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Mouat explained the urgency for introducing 'organic changes' in the system of education under which "Hindoos

exclusively are educated at the Hindoo College, whilst there is in Calcutta no Government College whatsoever accessible to youths of any other classes." In the circumstances the Hindu College being largely aided from the public fund, the government should seek "to change the character and present constitution of the Hindoo College, and to throw it open to all classes." Alternatively the Council of Education should draw up a project for a *General Metropolitan College* for the purpose of giving "a good elementary English education" to all the British Indian subjects irrespective of their caste and religion".

Before taking a final decision in the matter, the Council of Education had invited the opinion of respectable Indians including the members connected with the Hindu College on the subject. Thus Prasanna Kumar Tagore, when told about the plan, expressed that although personally speaking he was in favour of the government plan, he thought that such a measure cannot be adopted as "it would mean the violation of the original contract between the government and the original founders of the college". Then again the Maharaja of Burdwan, a hereditary Governor of the College, expressed his inability to agree with the views of the government. Babu Asutosh Dey, an elected member of the college, also expressed his strong disagreement with the government views. "The Hindoo College", commented Asutosh Dey, "when established in the year 1816, was designed for the education of the higher class of the Hindoos exclusively, so that the principle of exclusiveness has been the main foundation of the Hindoo College; an attempt to undermine the foundation would probably bring down the whole fabric itself." Babu Debendra Nath Tagore, however, reserved his comments on the subject.

In view of the conflicting opinions, the government found it rather difficult to arrive at a decision. But it could not even keep the

issue pending for a long time. Considering the financial constraints of the government, it cannot agree to the proposal of opening a new college while at the same time keeping the flow of money for the Hindu College intact. The Council of Education had, therefore, rejected the suggestion for the establishment of a new college on the following grounds :

- i) The proposed General Metropolitan College should be "the finest institution of the sort in India, but as it improved, the Hindu College would by comparison, dwindle into costly insignificance."
- ii) The staff for the proposed college should not be readily procurable without the aid of the staff of the Hindoo College.
- iii) A great increase to the education grant would be requisite which might be more beneficially expended, by founding a new college where there is none at present.
- iv) The plan for throwing open the Hindoo College to all people will not merely save the public money but would also restore a climate of mutual understanding among pupils of different caste and religion receiving a liberal education here.

The scheme of the so-called organic changes in the Hindu College, though agreed in principle, seemed to be fraught with some major complications which were noted in paragraphs 103 — 107 of the document under reference. It has been suggested that in opening the college, the admission of pupils must be restricted to the *respectable* classes of every persuasion or race. It is argued that although a Hindoo or Mahomedan of respectability will not object to the association, in school hours, of his children with those of the respectable members of a different faith, he will not consent to their sitting on the same benches with children of very low caste or social position.

The difficulty of determining the question of

respectability is extremely great, and no such distinction is recognised in any other college in Bengal or the North Western Provinces. Should, however, the Government regard the principle as proper to be adopted, the Council will spare no pains to carry it into effect.

A mode of partially effecting this object so far as Hindoos are concerned, has been suggested; which, as it has found favour with several of its members, the Council deem it right to submit for the consideration of Government. It is obvious that in this, as in other countries, the prejudices of rank, caste and stature, oppose themselves more strongly to the association of boys of tender years, than to those of youths of more advanced standing. The latter, whose character and habits are in some degree formed, are naturally less likely to suffer by contact with persons of a lower class. On the other hand, the student of humbler origin, will generally, as he advances in intellectual cultivation, become more refined and throw off much of what in his former manners or mode of thinking may have been objectionable. As a general rule, the mixture of ranks is greater at our English universities than at our schools; and nobody complained of it. The gist of the Council's proposal is to substitute a General Metropolitan College for the College Department of the Hindoo College. This they recommended with reference both to the necessity of providing a sound English Education for the more advanced Mahomedan students, and to general considerations. But the Hindoo College as it now exists, contains a Junior Department in which young boys receive, though at a higher cost, no better education than that which they may obtain at the Branch School. And many Hindoo gentlemen of high respectability (e.g., Baboo Russomoy Dutt) do in fact prefer the Branch School to the Junior Department of the College as a place of instruction for young children. To retain a Junior Department as part of a general and open college would not, the Council conceive,

be necessary. But if the Most Noble the Governor of Bengal should think it expedient to make any concession to the feeling above referred to, that object may be attained by retaining the Junior Department of the Hindoo College, but as a separate Institution, and under a different name. It might be reserved for Hindoos exclusively retaining if found expedient, the higher rate of schooling fees now paid there, as a means of excluding those who are not of the higher classes. "This arrangement", it has been then made quite clear in the conclusion, "is not recommended as abstractedly desirable, but it is suggested as a mode by which opposition on the part of those whose goodwill it is desirable to conciliate, may be avoided."

This long deliberation then came to an end with a final message from Beadon to Mouat contained in the letter No. 527, dated 21 October 1853. The following excerpts from the letter (paragraphs 14, 15, 22, 27 & 28) may be examined :

The native managers of the Hindoo College were so very much unwilling to accept the Government proposal, that the government at last thought it impolitic to force its decision upon them.

His Lordship nevertheless is of opinion that it is inexpedient to throw open the Hindoo College to all classes and to convert it into the Metropolitan College of the Government in the manner proposed by the Council.

It is impolitic, His Lordship thinks, to afford unnecessarily a pretext for the circulation of any colorable complaints that the Government is breaking faith with the Hindoo Community, that it is promiscuously admitting all classes to a Seminary which was established for Hindoos alone.

The government, therefore, decided to withdraw from the management of the college and then to establish a new college separately according to its own scheme. The scheme

then which His Lordship wishes to suggest would, when fully developed, stand thus :

A new general college should be established at Calcutta by the Government and designated "The Presidency College". The college should be open to all youths of every caste, class or creed. The Principal, Professors and other staff of the Senior Department of the present Hindoo College should become the establishment of the Presidency College. The Hindoo College thus modified by the withdrawal of its Senior Department should be maintained exclusively for Hindoos. It should then consist of two main divisions, namely the Sanscrit College as at present constituted and a Junior Department which should be for the reception, as at present of Hindoo children of the higher classes on higher fees.

The establishment of the Hindu College in 1854 as shown in the Presidency College Correspondence Volume, January 1854 — May 1855 (forty volumes of this series are preserved in the library of the Presidency College) was as under —

<i>College Department</i>	<i>Junior Department</i>
J. Sutcliffe, Principal	J.B. Shaha
W. Grateel	Benoy Kumar Banerjee
K. Hard	Hare Chunder Dutt
J. Rowe	Gopee Kishore Mitra
<i>Senior Department</i>	
R. James	Joy Gopaul Sett
C.T. Vaughan	Sreenauth Bose
J.B. Grisinthwaite	Gopaul Chander Dutt
Baboo R. C. Mitter	Gopaul C Bandopadhyay
Petumber Pundit	Mahendra Kumar Ray (Acting)
Goureebhusan De, Librarian	Jadonauth Shaha
	Pundit Luckee Narain
	Bacha Ram,
	Calidoss & Pursona

Once the decision about the proposed Presidency College was taken, the following proceedings were recorded at a meeting of the Council of Education, dated the 10th May 1854.

Mr. Sutcliffe, the Principal of the Hindoo College having been invited to assist the meeting in the consideration of the necessary alterations in the Hindoo College consequent on the partial sanction given by Government to the scheme of the Presidency College, it was resolved :

- (1) That the Presidency College should be opened on the 15th June 1854.
- (2) That students be admitted without reference to caste or race.
- (3) That the monthly schooling fee for the Presidency College be Rs.5/-.
- (4) That an entrance fee of ten Rupees be required on admission to the college, but that a special exemption to made (sic) in favour of the present students in the Hindoo College Department and of those who would have been promoted to it from lower schools had the session opened as usual on the 1st June.

Here ends the record entitled *Papers relating to the establishment of the Presidency College of Bengal*. On a close examination of the contents of the record, however, a confusion occurs about the exact date when the college was opened or started to work. In his article in *Presidency College, Calcutta : Centenary Volume 1955* Prof Subodh Chandra Sengupta wrote: "the Hindu College closed on the 15th April 1855, and the Presidency College started work on the 15th June 1855." This information has, however, been contradicted by what was resolved in the meeting of the Council of Education, dated 10.5.1854, which has put the date one year earlier, i.e., 15 June 1854. The date given in the Council proceedings can be further confirmed by a letter of the even date written by H. Woodrow, in which J. Sutcliffe was addressed as Principal of the Presidency College. The argument that the college though

formally opened in 1854 started work one year after, does not seem to be tenable. The message of the letter under reference disproves the hypothesis.

Turning from Hindu College episode, one may now look at another subject, i.e., the admission of lady students into the Presidency College. Prof. Sipra Sarkar while giving her reminiscences of college life (Autumn Annual, Vol. XX : 1991-92) tells us that though girls had been studying in the College for some time, "the co-education policy was still unstable, no girl having been admitted to the Intermediate course (1946-48)." One of the Principals of Presidency College, however, tried to formulate this policy. The story was told in a file of the Government of Bengal, General Department, Education, No.4C/20 of 1897. The facts of the case may be summed up here.

Towards the middle of 1897, the attention of the Lt. Governor was drawn to the discussions in the newspapers about the admission to the Presidency College of two lady students. The newspapers which appeared to have reflected a section of the public opinion could not take the matter easily and one of them made the following comment :

"Considering that there is always in Calcutta such a well-managed institution for the education of females as the Bethune College, we cannot understand what cogent reasons urged their (the lady students') guardians to put them in an institution conducted exclusively for the education of young men. It is decidedly a retrograde measure. While the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge have shown themselves peculiarly orthodox in matters of female education, it is to be deeply regretted that some unwitting advocates of radical reform in India have rushed in where angels dare not tread."

A correspondent of the *Englishman* further remarked that the argument that the ladies should also be allowed to receive the benefits of an improved system of education available only at the Presidency College is not tenable. "The Bethune College", wrote the correspondent of the *Englishman* of the 4th August 1897, "is the Institution set apart for the education of the female students. If the teaching staff of that institution was found bad, that authorities in charge of that institution should have been appealed to for a better one."

The Government was visibly perturbed at the expression of such wide-spread public resentment. Government had so far allowed the admission of lady students only in the Medical College and that even was felt necessary for getting the proposed Zenana Hospitals equipped with trained lady-doctors. There was also another exception. One Miss Sarabala Biswas was, under the special order of the Director of Public Instruction, admitted into the Ravenshaw College of Cuttack. These apart, there was not a single instance where ladies have had a chance to mix freely with the menfolk whether in schools, colleges and other public offices. The case of one Miss Cohen whose application for enrolment as an Attorney being rejected by the High Court is a clear indication of the trend of the time. The Government had to, therefore, advise C. A. Martin, the Director of Public Instruction to call an explanation from the Principal of the Presidency College submitting the reasons which prompted him to admit the said girl students in his College in violation of the existing practice of the country.

These girls about whom there was such ado were the daughter of Dr. P. K. Ray who was himself an eminent Professor of Presidency College and also of Mr. R. N. Ray, the then Deputy Comptroller-General of India. The reasons for admitting these students were at long last submitted by the D.P.I. His note is

quoted verbatim below :

"Mr. Rowe, Officiating Principal of the Presidency College wrote to me unofficially, informing me that he had application from the parents of the two young ladies requesting that they might be permitted to join the Presidency College. In reply, I stated that if he had no objection, I had none. I also had conversations with the fathers of the two girls on the subject, stating that their desire was to give them the very best education that was possible, and this could not be obtained in the Bethune College. One of these gentlemen is Dr. K. P. (sic) Ray (Civil List, No.4, page 208), himself a Professor of the Presidency College. The other is I believe styled Comptroller of Indian Treasuries.

I never contemplated that any opposition would come from the fathers of the male students of the College, and from what I learn from Mr. Rowe, everything is going on in a most satisfactory manner. The ladies are properly escorted to College each day, and when they go from one class room to another, they do so with one of the junior Professors in attendance."

The explanation of the Director of Public Instruction ended with a note in which the government was requested to issue a clear directive in the matter. "In these circumstances it is for orders whether Government Colleges in Bengal, which have hitherto been open to boys only, can be thrown open to ladies also. The private Colleges in Calcutta have not yet been thrown open to the latter."

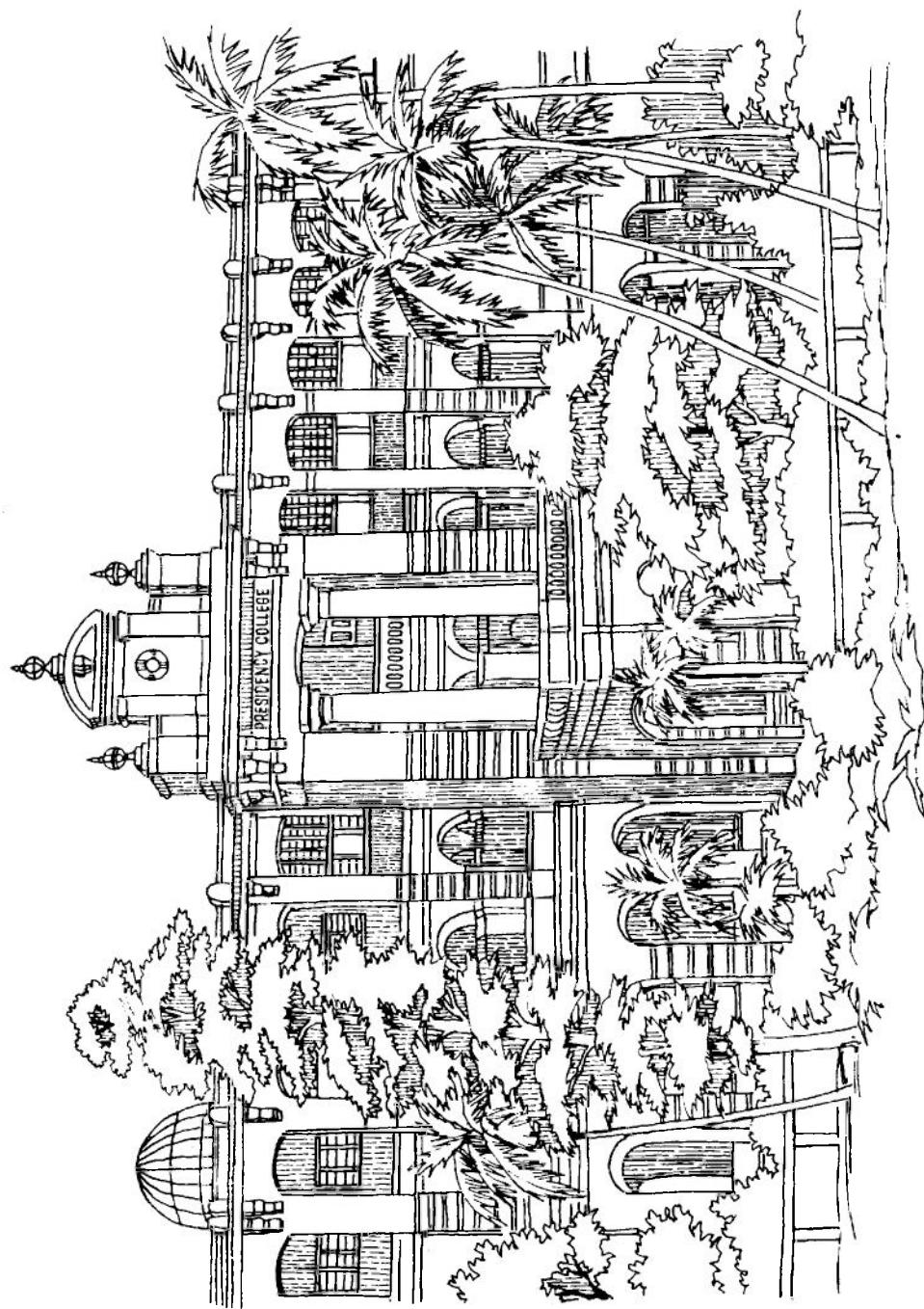
The reaction of the government can be well understood. "His Honour thinks that an important change of the kind should not have been introduced without obtaining the previous orders of Government on the subject." But what cannot be cured must be endured. "Now that the change has been made, and it is

reported to be working satisfactorily, the Lieutenant-Governor will not interfere at all events for the present," but then it was desired "that all such questions may in future be submitted to Government for decision."

### References

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HENRY LOUIS VIVIAN DEROZIO