

My Reminiscences

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Sixty-five years is a long time to look back upon; but to me it seems as if it was only yesterday when I first entered the portals of an institution hallowed by an array of the great intellectuals of our country. Indeed, to a student coming from the mofussil, entrance into this college was like an ambition fulfilled. The stately building with its spacious classrooms of prodigious height, its grand staircase, its library stacked with volumes of books, its common rooms, the lawns, the cricket pitch, its solemn atmosphere — in fact, everything — inspired awe in my young heart. I thought of the galaxy of great men of the 19th century Bengal, who had the privilege of attending this prestigious institution. They included academics of the highest distinction, jurists, reformers, public figures, statesmen and a host of luminaries who ushered in the new learning in Bengal — as well as India. I thought myself extraordinarily lucky to get a place here.

In 1927, the country was in a political ferment. There was an upsurge of political activities in the college, resulting in the expulsion of some of its brilliant students. The atmosphere was surcharged with suspense. That was the year when the Simon Commission visited India. There were cries of "Simon go back" in the streets by Bengali youths who were chased and lathi-charged by the police. The political scenario was explosive.

In our time, all the Principals were Englishmen : Ramsbotham, Stapleton and Barrow. Of them, I came in contact with Barrow who used to teach us Milton in the Honours classes. He was a mild and amiable

man who loved his students.

The professor who made the profoundest impression on me in the First Year class was Professor Kuruvila Zachariah who taught us British History. He generally did not take Intermediate classes, but agreed on his own to teach us. His style and delivery captivated us. There were three other professors of History, all equally famous. Prof. U. N. Ghosal taught us Greek History, and Prof. Benoy Kumar Sen Roman History. Prof. Surendra Chandra Mazumdar seemed to know his students intimately and taught us British Constitutional History in the B.A. class.

As regards the English Department, it had a galaxy of brilliant professors. Besides Principal Barrow, there was Prof. Bejoy Gopal Mukherjee who was as solid as a rock with his french-cut beard. In our First Year class, he taught us poetry. I still remember his lectures on Wordsworth's "The Daffodils" which he made as plain as day-light to us. Then, there were Prof. Hiron Kumar Banerjee who taught us *The Bible* and Prof. Manju Gopal Bhattacharya who read prose with us. In our Degree classes, we had the good luck to be taught by Prof. A. K. Chanda, an M.A. of Oxford University, as well as Profs. P. C. Ghosh, Srikumar Banerjee and Somnath Moitra. All of them were veterans in their respective subjects. Prof. Chanda taught us Philology. Prof. Ghosh taught Shakespeare, Ben Johnson, Dryden and Pope. Prof. Ghosh took special classes on Sundays, and also on weekdays after college hours. Prof. Banerjee, who specialised in Romantic poetry, delivered lectures on the Romantics, which we heard with rapt attention. Profs. Ghosh and Banerjee were also my post-graduate teachers. I do not now remember what subject Prof. Moitra

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taught us, but his lectures were impressive. It was when we were B.A. students in 1929 that Prof. S. C. Sengupta of revered fame had been appointed to our college. He was a very lovable personality, then a very young man, and soon won our hearts. He was in charge of tutorial classes, and he used to dilate on Rabindranath and Saratchandra. We were very much drawn to him and looked forward expectantly to attending his lectures.

In those days, the Bengali Department had no separate existence. It was an appendage of the Sanskrit and Pali Department, which was headed by Nilmoni Pandit. Our teachers were Harihar Pandit (Shastri), Sibaprosad Bhattacharya and Sadananda Bhaduri. All of them were competent men and very popular too. They taught both Sanskrit and Bengali.

In our time, few students chose Mathematics as one of their compulsory subjects in their I.A. course. They had to attend Mathematics classes with the I.Sc. students. As a result, I came to be acquainted with a good number of science students. Our teachers were Profs. Khagen Chakravarti, Bhupendra Chandra Das and Ananta Mohan Sengupta. They were all very good teachers.

My favourite haunt in the college was the Arts Library where I used to be comfortably seated with a book whenever I got any leisure. The din of the common room held no attraction for me. In our time, the great drawback of the

college was that it could not boast of a spacious assembly hall where staff and students could congregate to attend the lectures of eminent personalities. The place, where we assembled for such purposes, was the Physics Lecture Theatre. Poet Rabindranath and novelist Saratchandra occasionally graced the meetings with their august presence. Physical training classes were compulsory after college hours.

Now about a few of my contemporaries. Ardent friendships developed with some of them, who are no more. Robin Moitra, the great amateur actor, Amal Kumar Mukerjee and Rabindranath Ray were among them. Two very distinguished classmates of mine, who are still shedding their lustres, are Debesh Das, the litterateur, and Ajit Ray, the jurist. I may refer here to another personality. He was Dr. Sanat Kumar Basu, the late Principal of our college. He was one of the best students of Asutosh College, Bhowanipore, and used to visit my late elder brother, Prof. Mohini Mohan Mukerjee of that college at our house. Sanat and I used to have our lessons jointly under my brother. He was an amiable soul and a perfect gentleman, and a great friend of mine.

Finally, I feel proud of the fact that my brothers, the late Mohini Mohan, the late Mohit Mohan and the late Mohadeb were also alumni of Presidency College, their respective years of study being 1912-18, 1919-25 and 1932-38.