

# Presidency, Now and Then

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In the evening of one's life, one is bound to look back at events and ties that were dear to one's heart. Though we - most of us - almost tend to efface the Alma Mater from our mind as soon as we pass out, this college, that is, Presidency College is an institution which is difficult to forget. Though active association is seldom possible, the college does have a place in our heart always, everywhere. That is why wherever we are, we search out Presidencians – be it in Delhi or in New York. Way back in 1971, when I was posted in Delhi in Govt. of India's service, we, a few of us, gathered one evening in the External Affairs Hostel in Curzon Road now Kasturba Gandhi Marg as Mukurda's guests. With the lingering nostalgia in mind the idea of an Alumni Association of the college in Delhi sprouted there. Advertisements in local dailies followed and in an amazingly short time a staggering response from the old Presidencians of Delhi overwhelmed us. Shortly thereafter one midsummer evening in 1971 the birth of the association was formalised with Ranadhir Sharma Sarkar as President, Mukur Kanti Khisa as Secretary and myself as Treasurer. There was no looking back thereafter. The Delhi Association became stronger and stronger not only in terms of number enrolled but also in its diverse interests and activities. Musical evenings, Rabindra Jayanti, Bengali New Year Day, Vijaya Sammelani, Drama Festival, College Founders' Day, Picnic, etc., were regular features. Almost every member – high or low in present pursuits – wholeheartedly participated. Old memories of the college days were revived, new contacts and friendships grew, the social umbrella widened and soon the Association became a well known and endeared forum for interaction amongst Alumni of the college. The Association's roster

of members replaced in no time the Telephone/Address directory of the place for the Alumni. Many of the old and founder members left Delhi but the forum they founded and nursed with utmost interest and care remained undisturbed. It grew more and more in strength in the days that followed. I look back with a sense of pride and extreme satisfaction to those rosy days of a growing forum which bears the torch of Presidency and sustains its message and bond of fraternity in a place geographically far away from Calcutta.

After about two decades today here in Calcutta when I visit the college often to attend Alumni Association Executive Council Meetings, every time my mind transports me instantly back to those salad days in the college in mid-fifties. So many little girls with pigtails and mostly clad in colourful Salwar Kameez remind me of a sprinkle of serious looking saree-clad girls in our time. The boy-girl relationship was at best very formal though friendly unlike today's informal, close and free relationship. Do we not feel both awkward and envious ? The boys too, in their avis jeans and T shirts are vastly different from our breed generally dhoti-clad, serious in their bearing looking mostly at the feet of the girl classmates like Lakshman and keeping a very safe distance though mischievous at times only when away from them. Yet as today, then also quite a few love-locked relationships grew, some even ending in lifelong wedlock living happily ever after. Truly speaking, though outwardly different, their inner relationship has perhaps remained unchanged over the years and decades and that is only natural.

Again the Library of the college - in look, spirit and service has not changed at all over these decades. It maintains the same dusty,

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ruffled and untidy look and the dull and sombre atmosphere. The students then and today look unduly solemn inside this dimly lighted weird chamber filled with dusty benches and glass almirahs packed with books and pamphlets serious in content and large gold-rimmed framed portraits of great educationists of Bengal hanging precariously from the vapid walls. It is indeed a wonder how these stocks of books lasted inspite of colossal neglect and the languorous climatic conditions of the city. However, the Library as then and perhaps even now evokes awe, wonder and reverence in the young serious minds. Now at the instance of the Alumni Association and with the munificence of the State Govt. on the occasion of the tercentenary of the city, a new air-conditioned Library chamber has been built for safe upkeep of rare valuable books and portraits of the college.

In our times, the faculty consisted of male teachers only but today's faculty has a sprinkle of lady members who are by any standard competent teachers in their respective fields. The change in the faculty's sex bias started with the induction into the English Department of Professor Kajal Sen Gupta. Unlike the girl students, they do not add blush and gloss but only the idea of liberalism to this great institution where students are not to be

insulated from the larger social milieu.

In our days the college looked an educational institution par excellence and breathed academics always. With the political graffiti and posters not even remotely linked with the college and education in general pasted on every nook and corner of the building, that serene and academic atmosphere has perhaps disappeared for ever. Today's generation seem to appreciate general awareness of the social and political goings on at home and abroad more than studies from text books. They are being tutored more by their political mentors for processions and gheraoes towards achievement of a never attainable proletarian paradise than by their teachers on learning and study. But can these blooming buds be blamed considering the mess created by the mercenaries and political hirelings in the social, educational, economic and political spheres in the country ?

The young innocent learners are being used as pawns to swell the number for political parties in their dirty designs. This number game in the guise of democracy has already ruined many a time honoured and abiding institution and many a brilliant mind. Who will stem this decadence ?