

Principal Dr. J. C. Sengupta—As I saw him

During my tenure of eleven years in the Presidency College, Calcutta I have worked under four Principals of which Dr. J. C. Sengupta impressed me most. His relations with both teachers and students of the college had been excellent. A good teacher, administrator and enthusiastic in the extra-curricular activities, he took keen interest in organizational affairs.

Although he was not an alumnus of this college he thought that an association of old students of the college should be started. In 1951 at his initiative the Presidency College Alumnae Association was formed. He was the first Secretary. The Association took active and organised interest in the welfare of the college.

Due to the initiative of Dr. Sengupta, the Indian Science Congress was held in the campus of Presidency College in the first week of January, 1952. As the Local Secretary of the Congress he worked day and night for making proper arrangements. A huge pandal was erected on the college lawn for the inauguration ceremony of the Congress, to be inaugurated by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Prime Minister of India. The pandal had to accommodate more than one thousand delegates. He thought that this was a good occasion for the students of the college so that they could develop in them scientific bent of mind. He made students of all disciplines student members of the Congress and a gallery was erected to accommodate them. Prof. J. N. Mukherjee, an illustrious alumnus of this college was the President of the

Sachchidananda Banerjee*

Congress. Another insignificant alumnus, Sachchidananda Banerjee, was the President of the Physiology Section of the Congress. With the help of the Tea Board Dr. Sengupta arranged to provide tea to all the delegates. In the evenings cultural programmes were arranged. One of these programmes was with the famous blind singer, Sri Krishna Chandra Dey and the exponent of Rabindra Sangeet, Sri Pankaj Kumar Mallick. They held spell bound all the delegates by their melodious songs. I am attending Science Congress since 1941. The 1952 Science Congress at the Presidency College was the best and all the credit for the same goes to Dr. Sengupta.

In December 1952 Dr. Sengupta arranged a felicitation ceremony to welcome a distinguished alumnus of the college, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India. A nicely decorated pandal was erected. A galaxy of distinguished people like Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Dr. Harendra Kumar Mookherji, the Governor of West Bengal the teachers and students of the College and others were present to greet the President of India. The deliberations of the meeting were in English but Dr. Rajendra Prasad spoke in chaste Bengali. That was a memorable occasion for all of us. Dr. Sengupta could gather addresses of some of the colleagues of Dr. Rajendra Prasad all of whom were invited to meet Dr. Rajendra Prasad. They talked about their old days in the hostel and the college. I found our President was a different man. Dr. Sengupta and myself were present and enjoyed their conversation.

In June 1955 Centenary celebration of the formal conversion of the Hindu College, Senior Department, into Presidency College was arranged by Dr. Sengupta, which continued from June 15 to 20. This was a memorable celebration and most of the credit was due to Dr.

Sengupta. The centenary volume published on the occasion was assisted by Professor Susobhan Chandra Sarkar whose birth centenary we observed in our college recently.

Dr. Sengupta encouraged extra-curricular activities of the students. He played tennis with them. He joined the students in their steamer party in which I was also invited. The students used to organise cultural functions in the Arts library or in the lecture theatre of the Physics department where we could find Dr. Sengupta. Sambhu Mitra, not so famous at that time, enacted a single man street drama in the Arts Library hall. The comedian Jahar Roy also gave his performance in the Physics lecture theatre.

In 1952 I was elected a Fellow of the Indian National Science Academy. This was an honour to a scientist in recognition of his contribution in science. As soon as the information was known to Dr. Sengupta he sent a letter congratulating me. I informed the Director of Public Instruction, Government of West Bengal about this. In reply the D.P.I. enquired if the acceptance of the fellowship was remunerative and the same would interfere with my normal official duties. I protested. I was surprised to know the ignorance of the Directorate of Public Instruction about the Fellowship. Dr. Sengupta did not like the communication from the D.P.I. and he expressed the same to other professors of the college attached to him.

In the last week of December every year I used to arrange Re-Union of the past and present students of the department in the college. In the cultural programme dramas were staged. According to the rules of the University of Calcutta prevalent at that time female students were not permitted to act with the male students. We, therefore, used to arrange two dramas, one exclusively by girl students and the other by male students. I used to train the girls in their acting. Dr. Sengupta advised me to abandon the drama by the girl students as some of the guardians of the girls did not like my participation. This will indicate his love for me. In 1951 Dr. Harendra Kumar Mookherji was appointed Governor of West Bengal. I invited him to be the Chief Guest of our Re-union function, because he was a distinguished alumnus of the college. The Governor accepted my invitation. This was the first social function attended by him as the Governor of West Bengal. As Principal of the college he welcomed the Governor when he arrived and was present in the inauguration ceremony, of which the President was Dr. J. C. Ghosh, a distinguished alumnus of the college. In many of our re-union functions not only Dr. Sengupta but his wife, Sreemati Kamala Sengupta used to be present.

Dr. Sengupta left the Presidency College in 1956 to Head the Botanical Survey of India. We used to meet in the Science Congress every year and exchanged our greetings. He was active till the end of his life. His tragic death occurred on his way to the Ballygunge Science College. We lost a distinguished Scientist, a good administrator and a perfect gentleman. In the centenary year of the birth of Prof. Jatish Chandra Sengupta I offer my homage. I will never forget the advice and encouragement I received from him. May his soul rest in peace.

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