

Strange Encounters

I joined the Presidency College in the summer of 1951 as a first year student of Intermediate in Arts. I came from a relatively little known school of a small town over sixty miles away from Calcutta. Because of my lack of exposure to 'big things' the historic steps of the main building of the college, the wide corridors and the general air of majesty that permeated the whole campus daunted me. Though I was a boarder of Eden Hindu Hostel and had already spent a day there, I was little nervous the first day at Presidency. The boy who sat next to me in our first class at the college came from a south Calcutta school and seemed to know a lot about the students of the college. He knew even students of other classes. He could easily identify senior students of the college like Parthasarathi Gupta, Sukhomoy Chakravarty, Amartya Sen, Benoy Chaudhuri and many others who had, because of their outstanding performance in the University examinations, already become distinguished members of the Presidency student community. Most classes of the Arts Faculty were held in the main building and we all used the same library. So bumping into some of the senior students in the corridor or in the library was not unusual.

Dr. Jatish Chandra Sen Gupta had taken over as the Principal of the college the year before. Soon I came to know that he was a botanist and had spent many years as a student

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at the University of Heidelberg, Germany. My guide to the college had identified for me quite a few students and some renowned professors but he had failed to give me information about the Principal. Though it is rather unusual for a first year student, I met the Principal in his chamber about two weeks after our classes had begun. It happened like this : We were having classes in all the subjects including Sanskrit for which we had to walk across College Street to Sanskrit College. But we had no class in Logic for about two weeks. One day as we were discussing this in Room 22 where we were supposed to have the class of Logic, someone suggested that it might be a good idea to inform the Principal of our problem. I do not know why, but I volunteered to bell the cat. I went to the verandah in front of the Principal's office, filled in a 'visitor's slip' given by Sivaprasad, the Principal's bearer and, to my surprise, in no time, found myself in the Principal's chamber. Dr. Sen Gupta was sitting at his large desk. He was very neatly dressed in a safari suit and wore glasses. He had a very distinguished look. But what intrigued me most about his looks was his long sideburns. I was awed by the largeness of the room, its decor and the athletic presence of the Principal. Dr. Sen Gupta took off his glasses and asked me about my problem. Rather haltingly I stated the objective of my mission. That surprised him. "No body", he said, "ever came to me complaining of classes not being held. Students are usually happy to have some extra free hours. Why have you come ?" The script I had prepared did not have the answer to the questions Dr. Sen Gupta asked me. I just repeated what I had said before. He smiled and gave me a brief lecture on the lengthy and time-consuming procedure the administration of a government college had to go through to get a professor appointed or posted to a college. He advised me to be patient. Next week we had a professor teaching us Logic. A couple of days later when some of us were waiting near the big gong which hangs on the first floor near the staircase we saw Dr. Sen Gupta walk up the steps on way to his office. He stopped, called me and asked if our Logic classes were being held regularly. I thanked him for his prompt action. I saw bewilderment

and envy in the eyes of some of my classmates who had 'hoped' that I would be told off by the Principal for bothering him with a petty problem like 'Logic classes not being held'.

My next encounter with Principal Sen Gupta took place a year later. It was over the choice of editors of the College Wall Paper called 'Deyali'. As a sophomore I was elected a member of the College Students' Union Council which, at that time, was composed of 38 members drawn from graduate and undergraduate classes. The process of elections leading to the formation of the Students' Union of the Presidency College, during our time, was very different from what were practised in other Calcutta colleges or in the universities. By and large contests were between individuals who usually did not have any political affiliation. Political tags did not sell. Therefore, if someone belonged to any political group he preferred to hide it. No body ever pasted a poster on the wall—no body ever organized a meeting of his constituency to talk about his agenda. Individual persuasion and personal friendship rather than anything else determined the voting pattern of students. Compared to what we see to-day it was a colourless and tame affair. I contested in the election and got elected without being aware that there were two groups competing with each other to control the union. One was led by Suniti Kumar Bhose, the General Secretary of the union of that time and the other by Amartya Sen—who, to-day, needs no introduction. Both were fourth-year students attached to the Department of Economics. Soon I learnt that Amartyada's group had some members who belonged to the All India Students' Federation. But the group did not flaunt their closeness to S.F. as it was likely to have a negative impact on the students. One evening Sukhomoy Chakravarty, who, like me, was a boarder of Eden Hindu Hostel and my room mate Manas Das Gupta brought Amartya Sen, Parthasarathi Gupta, Benoy Chaudhuri and some others of that group to my room and introduced me to them. After a lengthy discussion, I along with two of my friends who had also been elected to the Students' Union Council decided to vote for 'Amartya Sen's Group'. It was decided that I would be their candidate for the position of 'Publications Secretary'. The election of the office bearers was conducted by Professor Bhabatosh Datta and presided over by the Principal. Nearly all candidates for various office bearers' positions from Amartyada's group lost. Surprisingly Susanta Bose won as the Debate Secretary and I won as the Publications Secretary from that group.

We were under the impression that the Publications Secretary had two things to do. It was his job to assist the Editor of the College Magazine and he chose the editors of the college wall paper and oversaw its publication. There was no problem about the College Magazine. Professor Bhabatosh Datta was the Professor-in-Charge and Ashin Das Gupta, at that time a fifth year student of history, was the editor. The problem came over the choice of the editor of the wall paper. At our meeting, usually held in the Coffee House, Amartyada had advised me to meet the Principal and get two names suggested by our group approved by the Principal. The following day I met the Principal and made enquiries about the choice of the editors of the wall paper. I was told that the responsibility of choosing the editors of 'Deyali' lay with the General Secretary of the Students' Union Council and not with the Publications Secretary. The General Secretary, Dr. Sen Gupta informed me, had already chosen two students as editors of the wall paper. Therefore, I need not worry about it. Dr. Sen Gupta was curt in his response. I had a feeling that my enquiry about the matter annoyed him. I informed Amartyada of the Principal's decision. Our interpretation of the Principal's behaviour was simple. We were convinced that the Principal was taking away the right of the Publications Secretary to choose the editors of the wall paper because he did not like our group which was suspected of belonging to the political left. We felt he was hostile to us and therefore we decided to be very careful in dealing with him.

After completing the first two years we continued at the college as Honours students.

I was studying history. Some of the 'leaders' of our group—Amartya Sen, Parthasarathi Gupta left for England though Sukhomoy Chakravarty and Benoy Chaudhuri continued as post graduate students. I was asked to lead the so-called 'SF Group'. In the election of the Students' Union in 1953 our group won all the positions of office bearers but lost the posts of Publications Secretary and the Secretary, Junior Common Room. I was elected the General Secretary of the Student's Union Council. Our almost total victory pleased us but once again I was apprehensive of a major confrontation with Dr. Sen Gupta over the selection of editors of 'Deyali'. I was sure he 'would be up for some mischief' again. To pre-empt any initiative from our opponents I rushed to see the Principal. Dr. Sen Gupta received me with a smile and congratulated me on my victory in the elections. "I am glad you came. I was looking for you. I need two names for editors to the wall paper", he said. I felt relieved. All my home-work for the possible confrontation with him went in vain. If Dr. Sen Gupta had deviated from the normal procedure of choosing the editors of 'Deyali' last year, at least he was consistent in his deviation. He did not ask the Publications Secretary who belonged to the so-called anti-SF group to recommend names of the editors. I appreciated that. I told him that we would like to have Sunil Pal who was doing Mathematics and Amiya Bagchi who was doing Economics with us as editors of the wall paper. Without any hesitation the Principal accepted Sunil's name but expressed his reservation about Amiya. 'Why can't you have somebody better? Amalendu Banerjee or Shyamalendu Banerjee—there are so many brilliant students in your class,' he said.

Sunil had stood first in the Matriculation Examination in 1951. Because of the publicity this academic feat usually received from the media, Sunil was widely known. Besides he was personally known to Dr. Sen Gupta. So he was acceptable. Amalendu had stood second in the Matriculation examination the same year. He stood first in the Intermediate-in-Arts in 1953 and Shyamalendu stood second in that examination. Amiya's academic performance was just as good—in fact more uniform than some of them. He was in the top ten category in both Matriculation and Intermediate-in-Science examinations. But for some reasons, his name escaped Dr. Sen Gupta. I told him that Amalendu had been elected the Secretary to the Rabindra Parishad and Shyamalendu was the newly elected Debate Secretary. I also told him something about Amiya's academic performance. He listened to me but apparently remained unimpressed by Amiya's bio-data and asked me to try to get 'someone better'. I met Dr. Sen Gupta next day and told him rather firmly that we did not intend to replace Amiya by somebody else. It looked like in the meantime he had made some enquiries with the Professors of the Department of Economics about Amiya and heard good things about him. But he did not mention this to me. He just said, "Well, if you insist". Sunil and Amiya worked as editors of the College Wall Paper for a year when we ran the Students' Council.

Ten years later Dr. Sen Gupta's only daughter Jashodhara insisted on marrying the same Amiya Bagchi whom he had rejected as an unsuitable candidate. I understand he was very proud of having Amiya Bagchi as his son-in-law. What an irony !

The problem I had with the Principal couple of months later was more serious. Dr. Cheddi Jagan, political leader from what was in those days known as British Guinea, came to visit India on invitation from Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India. Dr. Jagan who was of Indian origin, along with Forbes Burnham, who was of African origin, had formed the People's Progressive Party and launched a successful movement for Independence of their country from British colonial rule. The Constitution of 1953 introduced a two-chamber legislature and a ministerial system. In the election held that year PPP won 18 out of 23 elected seats of the Assembly and Dr. Jagan headed the cabinet which included Burnham as a minister. Six months after the Jagan-led team began to function, the colonial administration

suspended the government on ground that there was communist infiltration into the government. In an effort to mobilize international support, he came to India and also visited Calcutta. A committee headed by Professor Nirmal Chandra Bhattacharya was formed to take care of his tour of Calcutta. I met Professor Bhattacharya at his house in Ballygunge and asked if we could felicitate Dr. Jagan and Mr. Burnham at Presidency College. Professor Bhattacharya, an alumnus of Presidency was delighted and agreed to help me get the consent of Dr. Jagan to visit Presidency. I was advised to meet him following day at Great Eastern Hotel, at that time an excellent place.

The idea of meeting a leader from a foreign country who had been making newspaper headlines for some days made me little nervous. So I asked Amiya to accompany me. I thought he would be a dependable prop. Our meeting with Dr. Jagan at Great Eastern Hotel went off very well. He agreed to come to Presidency College the next day and talk to the students sometime in the afternoon. Mr. Burnham would go straight to Calcutta University. Dr. Jagan would meet him there after the programme at our college was over. In the meantime student leaders of about eight Calcutta colleges had met me and expressed their interest in taking part in the programme to felicitate Dr. Jagan. It was decided that it would be a joint felicitation to be held at the Physics Lecture Theatre of our College to be chaired by the Principal of Presidency College. As the General Secretary of the Students' Union of the host college I would propose the vote of thanks.

Next morning I met the Principal in his office and informed him of what had been arranged. He was furious. How could I arrange a meeting on the college campus to felicitate a distinguished state guest and get eight colleges involved in it without the prior approval of the Principal ? Such decisions were totally unacceptable to him. My answer was simple. The whole thing developed within twenty-four hours—to be precise between Saturday evening and Sunday evening. I did not have a chance to brief him on what was happening. Besides, the person who had played a significant role in this was Professor Nirmal Bhattacharya. If what I did was bad, how could a person of Professor Bhattacharya's stature help me do it ? The name of Professor Bhattacharya had a mellowing effect on Dr. Sen Gupta. He delivered a pretty long sermon on what I should do and what I must not. After he calmed down, I asked him if he would mind chairing the session. He agreed. The meeting at the Physics Lecture Theatre with Dr. Jagan as the main speaker went off very well. The hall was filled with people. Dr. Jagan was overwhelmed by the expression of support, and sympathy of the students of Calcutta for their cause. 'The Statesman' wrote a very good story on it. In fact the newspaper wrote more about the Presidency felicitation than about the one given at the Calcutta University. Having read the story, I went to see Dr. Sen Gupta. He had seen the report and to my surprise, complimented me for handling such an important event so well. He also added that he attended a dinner arranged in honour of the two visiting dignitaries hosted by Mr. Sadhan Gupta the Communist member of Parliament from south Calcutta. Apparently Dr. Jagan had made special mention of the reception he got at Presidency College which pleased Dr. Sen Gupta. I felt good.

January has always been a busy month for Presidency College. Twentieth of the month is the Founders' Day. Usually annual sports, re-union and all kinds of cultural and intellectual activities are organised during that time. In 1954 some new ideas came from certain quarters. The Presidency College Alumni Association was formed in 1951 with Dr. Sen Gupta as the founder secretary and Sri Atul Gupta, eminent lawyer and writer as the first president. The Alumni Association was toying with the idea of extending the re-union tea to include the present students. I was invited to attend a meeting held in the office of the Principal where two distinguished members of the Alumni Association, Professor Susobhan

C. Sarkar of the Department of History and Professor Santosh K. Roy of the Department of Geology and College Bursar of that time were present. Speaking on behalf of the Alumni Association, Professor Sarkar broached the subject and asked me if I could get Rs. 500 to be handed over to the PCCA for this purpose. I loved the idea and my colleagues in the Students' Council shared my opinion. We decided that we would try to raise some money by collecting 50 paise (at that time eight annas) from each participating student. Should we fail to raise Rs. 500, the committed amount would be paid to the PCAA from the regular budgetary allocation of the union. The money we raised was pea nuts. The union had no choice but to foot the bill.

On the Founders' Day the college was buzzing with activities. Sometime after recess I was on my way to the Senior Common Room to meet Professor Debipada Bhattacharya of the Bengali Department. Debibabu was the Professor-in-Charge of Rabindra Parishad and I needed to talk to him in connection with cultural programme we had planned for the Founders' Week. When I walked past the 'Algoo barrier' and entered the professors' common room I saw Professor Susobhan Sarkar standing near his desk by the side of the large window. He was looking at the lawn. He called me. When I went near him he said, 'Look at this wonderful sight. It looks so elegant'. It sure was a wonderful sight to have about 150 well laid tables complete with white covers, flower vases and good quality cups and saucers and four chairs to each spread in an organized manner on the large lawn. Professor Sarkar was never lavish in his words or awards. He was known for his controlled emotion. But that day he looked different. Later on I came to know that the suggestion of having the present students participating in the re-union tea originated with him. Its success, for obvious reasons, pleased him enormously. 'Would many students come'? He asked me. 'Many would come—but very few have paid' I replied. He advised me to get in touch with him should this create a financial problem for the Students' Union. I informed him that we had already set aside the amount we would need to pay the Alumni Association. Professor Sarkar thanked me for agreeing to the Alumni idea of a joint re-union tea. 'I hope this continues' he said. To some of us nothing meant more than some words of praise from Susobhan Sarkar. I thought I had been amply rewarded for all the hard work I had put in.

About an hour before the re-union tea was supposed to begin, Sibaprasad, the Principal's bearer came to me and said that the Principal wanted to see me. As I entered his room Dr. Sen Gupta rather apologetically said, 'I am sorry. I forgot to tell you that you are expected to offer the vote of thanks at the prize distribution ceremony. That will be held at Physics Lecture Theatre after the tea'. I agreed to do the job and rushed to the lawn where Satya Charan Banerjee popularly known as 'Teggart', the college care taker who doubled as the Assistant Superintendent of our hostel was overseeing the arrangements for tea. I had lent him the services of about twelve students who, Mr. Banerjee said, were doing a good job. The tea and the prize distribution ceremony went off very well. In the absence of Sri Atul Gupta, Sri Satinath Roy, vice president of the PCAA chaired the session at the Physics Lecture Theatre. Sri Roy profusely thanked the leadership of the Students' Union for its support for the vastly extended Re-Union Tea. I felt flattered.

Soon after the Founders' Week celebrations were over the Principal called me. He complimented me for the nice programmes we had organized. Besides the Re-union Tea, we had organized a debate involving some eminent past students, a 'Sahitya Sabha' and a cultural evening. Dr. Sen Gupta made special mention of the cultural programme in which Rabindra sangeet singers like Debabrata Biswas, Dwijen Mukherjee, Purabi Mukhopadhyay (at that time Chatterjee) sang and the famous stage actor Sambhu Mitra recited poems. I noticed that Dr. Sen Gupta never missed any programme organized by the students. In the

evening programmes he always brought Mrs. Sen Gupta with him and sometime also brought their daughter Jashodhara. Later on I came to know that his wife Nilima Sen Gupta was an accomplished singer. I am tempted to infer that Mrs. Sen Gupta's love for Rabindrasangeet infected Dr. Sen Gupta. This explained the special mention of what he considered 'my display of good taste' in the selection of artistes. I had always been an avid listener of Rabindrasangeet. It looked like, at last, the Principal and I had struck the right cord. We had begun to understand and appreciate each other better.

I was wrong. A big jolt came a month later. In February 1954 about 18000 teachers of West Bengal Schools working under the umbrella of the All Bengal Teachers' Association demanded that the recommendation of the Madhyamik Board be implemented. This meant that they wanted Rs. 35 as dearness allowance on a salary scale of Rs. 73—Rs. 180 per month. When the teachers failed to get redressal of their grievances through dialogue with Dr. B. C. Roy and his colleagues, they decided to go on an indefinite strike. They staged a massive rally in front of the Raj Bhawan. The Presidency College Students' Union decided that the students of the Presidency College should boycott classes in sympathy for the legitimate demands of the teachers. In fact we did not have to do much to persuade the students to make the decision of the Union a success. The response, because of the propriety of the cause we tried to uphold, was virtually spontaneous. We went on strike for about 5 days—an unprecedented event in Presidency College.

As expected from the Principal of the premier Government College of the state, the call for boycotting classes in support of the school teachers who chose to defy government instruction, our action was not liked by Dr. Sen Gupta. He called me to his office several times and cautioned me. Initially he tried to impress upon me the negative consequences this would have on my career. When that did not work his tone changed and it became tougher. Towards the end he hinted at the possibility of disciplinary action to be taken against me. When even that did not work, he gave up. In due course the movement came to an end and we went back to our classes. But the matter did not end there. In my report of the activities of the Students' Union Council which was published in the next issue of the College Magazine I had, as I ought to have, mentioned the role of our college in the strike called by the teachers of West Bengal. Apparently, a copy of that magazine found its way to Writers' Buildings and some bureaucrats of the Department of Education saw my report. It looks like a 'big boss' from Writers had expressed his annoyance at the official recording of a bad thing like going on a strike by Presidency College students and told off (if that is the right expression) the Principal. Dr. Sen Gupta did to me what his 'boss' had done to him. He told me off. His point of view was interesting. Leading a strike was bad enough; why did I have to make it worse by writing a report and getting it published in the College Magazine? 'You have no idea of ways things work in life', he said. 'You have been creating problems for yourself and now you have created one for me', he continued. His logic escaped me. How could I submit a report on the activities of the Students' Union Council and omit the strike? One may or may not like the strike we organized—but it definitely was a major act of the Students' Union. We failed to understand each other's position. I thought the gap between us was unbridgeable.

The beauty about the personality of Dr. Sen Gupta and most of the professors we had at Presidency during our time was that they were decent human beings and highly committed teachers. Most of them were excellent teachers; some were great scholars and all of them loved teaching as a profession and the students they taught. They were never petty. They did not hold grudges. Dr. Sen Gupta proved that in no time.

On the morning of Saraswati Puja day I was busy doing something in my room at the hostel. Jnanabrata Bhattacharya, the star singer of our time who stayed in the hostel came

to me and said that the Principal had come to our hostel and he was looking for me. I accompanied Jnanabrata to the puja pandal and saw Dr. and Mrs. Sen Gupta eating 'Prasad'. 'How are you Sriman Jyotirmoy Pal Chaudhuri' Dr. Sen Gupta greeted me. His language told me he was in a good mood and I have been forgiven. 'What is the latest news on your Shakespeare Play ?' he asked. The Principal was referring to the arrangements we had made to have 'Merchant of Venice' staged by Geoffrey Kendal's group 'Shakespeareana'. We were hoping that we would be able to raise enough funds by selling tickets to the students and teachers to pay Mr. Kendal and meet all other expenses. All arrangements had been made but we faced an unexpected problem. For some unforeseen reason the College would remain closed for about four days in succession. This would give us only two days to sell tickets. This, I thought, would be difficult. I informed Dr. Sen Gupta of the predicament I was in. 'What is the wish of the General Secretary Saheb now ?' the Principal continued his jovial tone. I informed him that I had talked to Mr. Kendal the night before and enquired if it would be inconvenient to him should we cancel the programme. "Mr. Kendal has agreed to treat the programme as cancelled" I added. The Principal put his hand on my shoulder and said, 'You have done that ! This is precisely what I was going to advise you. That was a wise decision. I have one suggestion to offer. You should meet him personally and explain the circumstances that have compelled you to make this decision,' Dr. Sen Gupta said. I agreed to do that.

I was highly impressed by what Principal Sen Gupta did and said that morning. It was clear that he had thought about the inconvenience the staging of 'Merchant of Venice' would cause to the Union in terms of financial responsibility and image. He wanted to make sure that this was averted. Disagreeing with a student over a political issue was one thing; duty of a Principal to save a student of an embarrassment was an entirely different matter. Dr. Sen Gupta had no hesitation in proffering me the advice he thought I needed at that time. Do we still have teachers or academic administrators who would feel the same way ? I would not say the species is extinct, but it definitely is endangered.

In accordance with the advice of Dr. Sen Gupta I went to meet Mr. Kendal at the cozy looking pensione on Sudder Street where he and members of his team were staying. I was received by a pretty young girl. A few minutes later Mr. Kendal came and I explained to him the reason that had forced us to cancel the programme. He seemed to appreciate it. The pretty girl brought some tea which Mr. Kendal and I shared. The young girl was Mr. Kendal's daughter Jennifer who later on became Jennifer Kapoor. To be offered tea by Jennifer Kendal was a 'bonus' I got by following Dr. Sen Gupta's advice. I wish I had the courage to see Dr. Sen Gupta and thank him for creating such a wonderful opportunity for me.

My tenure as the General Secretary was coming to an end. We thought of holding a 'Barshamangal' under the auspices of the Rabindra Parishad. Amalendu Banerjee of our team was the Secretary to the Rabindra Parishad. Amalendu was one of the finest students of history the college ever had, but he had no interest in music and even less in organizing a Barshamangal. So the whole thing became 'my baby'. Sisir Kumar Das, who was doing Bengali Honours wrote a beautiful script for it. We decided to have Suchitra Mitra, Debabrata Biswas, Purabi Chatterjee to sing the more important solos. Sambhu Mitra was invited to read the script and recite the poems that were embedded in the script. About 8 students—male and female—were to sing the choruses. We needed to choose one female student to sing a solo—'Aji Jharer Rate Tomar Abhisar'. Three girls expressed their eagerness to sing the solo. We heard all of them sing. I thought one girl sang much better than the other two. So I chose her. It so happened the girl chosen was Dr. Sen Gupta's daughter Jashodhara, who had joined the College that year as a student in the English Department. My selection created

some problems for me. Some thought it was an attempt on my part to make amends with the Principal. Some went deeper to look for the reason.

The evening before the Barshamangal was supposed to be staged I went to the Principal's house at Bepin Pal Road to formally invite him and Mrs. Sen Gupta. I took Sisir who wrote the script with me. I introduced Sisir as the top student of the Bengali Department who had written the script. Principal looked at Sisir and said 'So you are the Sanglap'. I have had the experience of having tea at the Sen Guptas. I knew how generous Mrs. Sen Gupta was as a hostess. Sisir and I were treated with some very tasty home 'pithe'. The following evening Principal and Mrs. Sen Gupta came to listen to the programme. Quite a few Professors came with their families. Professor Debipada Bhattacharya who had taken keen interest in the preparation of the programme was delighted to see the Arts Library Hall fully packed. Jashodhara vindicated my selection of her by a superb rendition of the solo she was assigned to sing. Next day the Principal summoned me to his office and showered praises on me for what he called 'a wonderful display of good organisation, taste and quality'. If politics set up apart, Rabindrasangeet always bound us together.

Dr. Sen Gupta joined the Presidency College to teach Botany in July 1929. He became the Principal of the College in 1950. In 1955 he left Presidency to become the Chief Botanist, Botanical Survey of India. For a long time we did not meet. One afternoon in the winter of 1962-63 I was in the Indian Museum buying some tickets for a Children's Little Theatre programme. I heard some one calling me. The person calling me was Dr. Sen Gupta. I ran to him and touched his feet. He held me close to him. "How are you ? What are you doing now ?" he had so many questions to ask me. When he heard I was teaching at Hooghly Mohsin College, he was delighted. 'That is very good. Government Colleges are the best. But you should go abroad and do your Ph.D. If you apply for admission to a foreign univeristy or for a scholarship you may mention me as one of your referees. I shall write good things about you. There are certain qualities in you which most students do not have. You are different' he went on. I was bewildered. I looked at him. His face was lit with a glow that a 'genuine' teacher has when he meets his former pupil after many years. We walked together on Chowringhee Road for some time. He did most of the talking. In the meantime his chauffeur came and he got into his car. We said good bye to each other. We never met again. When he died in 1969 I was in England.

When I think of Presidency College of the fifties especially of the professors we had, I am reminded of a passage E. M. Forster wrote. In 'Two Cheers for Democracy' Forster wrote—

'I believe in aristocracy, though—if that is the right word, and if a democrat may use it. Not an aristocracy of power, based upon rank and influence, but an aristocracy of the sensitive, the considerate and the plucky. Its members are to be found in all nations and classes, and all through the ages, and there is a secret understanding between them when they meet. They represent the true human tradition, the permanent victory of our queer race over cruelty and chaos. Thousands of them perish in obscurity, a few are great names. They are sensitive for others as well as for themselves they are considerate without being fussy, their pluck is not swankiness but the power to endure, and they can take a joke.'

I must confess, when I enter the College campus now, stroll in the corridors, see the students and the professors walk by, these words do not flash in my mind. Things have changed.

* History (1951-55)