

BANGABASI COLLEGE



*A Centennial
Journey*

BANGABASI COLLEGE

One hundred years of glorious existence

*"Life is large and flung far,
More in Past than in Future—
Yet much much the sweeter."*

In this tiny triplet the Poet has brought home with consummate skill the wide immensity of life and its honeyed charm that lies more in the sweet reminiscences of the Past than in the rosy dreams of the Future.

Bangabasi College steps into one hundredth year of its fruitful existence this year and the members of its staff, students, ex-students and well-wishers are fully set to observe the centenary celebrations in all solemnity. Certainly this is an occasion for grateful remembrance of its past achievements and for cherishing hopes for its still glorious future.

Founded in 1887 by Acharya Girish Chandra Bose, one of the pioneers of higher education in the country, Bangabasi College had indeed a very humble beginning. It was started as a protest against Prime Minister Disraeli's reactionary Indian Education Bill (1868), which aimed at putting a stop to the spread of higher education in India, in general and Bengal, in particular. The great Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar had already shown how college education could be organised and managed by the Indians

themselves without official patronage of alien rulers. And within the short span of fifteen years grew up four historic colleges— Metropolitan Institution (later Vidyasagar College—1879), City College (1881), Ripon College (later Surendranath College—1884) and Bangabasi College (1887) —which were to play a seminal role in the history of higher education in Bengal. Of these four Colleges, Bangabasi soon became famous and a household word in Bengal, perhaps because of the peculiar charm in the name which was suggested to the Founder by one of his illustrious cousins Sri Jogendra Chandra Bose, who himself had been the editor of a journal of the same name, or because of its involvement in the national movement of the country.

FULFILMENT OF THE MISSION

This historic College was started as an adjunct of Bangabasi School (established in 1885) in a small rented house at 116, Bowbazar Street, with only 6 teachers on its staff and 12 students on its rolls. Sri Manmatha Mohan Bose was the first students of the College. Our founder also received active help and co-operation from his life-long friends like Satyendra Prasanna Sinha (later Lord Sinha), Bhupal Chandra Bose and Byomkesh Chakraborty. The College was affiliated only upto the First Arts standard till 1895. The affiliation for B. A. came in 1896. From that very year Latin was one of the subjects taught at this College. The College then consisted of two departments—the Arts and the Law. A special feature of the Arts Department was the arrangement for teaching the B. Course in Biology in addition to Physics and Chemistry. The Law Department was opened in 1896 with Pandit Nrisingha Chandra Mukherjee M.A. (Gold Medalist), B. L., Vidyaratna, as the professor-in-charge. The Department

had on its staff two outstanding legal luminaries of time, Satyendra Prasanna Sinha (later Lord Sinha) and Byomkesh Chakraborty. The College was also authorised to send up candidates for the M. A. Examination. Sri Indu Madhab Mallick, the famous inventor of the Ic-mic-cooker was the first student to obtain M. A. Degree from this College in 1898.

In the meantime, the College and the School had changed the location twice (116 and 118, Bowbazar Street) and finally in 1903 the College shifted to its present building in Scott Lane. This year also marked the start of the College Magazine, the first of its kind in the country. It was highly spoken of by the 1905 Report of the University Commission. Professor Lalit Kumar Banerjee was the inspiration behind it.

THE UNIVERSITY ACT OF 1904, ANTI-PARTITION AGITATION

The University Act of 1904 ushered in a new era in the history of the College. New courses of study were introduced from the beginning of the session 1907- 1908. On the Science side, the Intermediate and the Degree courses in Physics, Chemistry and Botany were the special line adopted in the College.

By 1908 arrangements were made for teaching vernacular in the First and Third year classes under the guidance and inspiration of Prof. Lalit Kumar Banerjee. Mention must be made here of the contribution of Acharya G. C. Bose to the introduction of vernacular as medium of instruction in schools and colleges. By 1910 affiliation in all the major subjects in Arts and Science upto the B. A. and B. Sc. Standards were granted to the College. Law

classes were already voluntarily closed and under the New Regulations there could not be any provision for M. A. classes in Private Colleges.

In 1910 the College ceased to be proprietary and came to be managed by a Board of Trustees formed to meet the exigencies of receiving Government grants-in-aid. The Board was composed of five members, including Hon'ble S. P. Sinha (Lord Sinha). The Governing Body of the College, which had been functioning since 1906 under the Chairmanship of Raja Peary Mohan Mukherjee of Uttarpara, was also enlarged.

BLAST OF THE ANTI-PARTITION AGITATION (1905-11)

In the meantime, the blast of the Anti-Partition Agitation lashed Bengal with all its fury and whole country convulsed with anger and protest on the one hand and brutal oppression on the other. On hearing the news of the 'Partition', the Founder Principal immediately closed the College. As a matter of fact, Acharya Bose, a true nationalist and a patriot as he was, fearlessly admitted ex-detenus and political sufferers as students and teachers in his College in spite of the frowns of the British Imperialists. The motto and mission of his life was—"Mother and Motherland are even superior to Heaven,"

THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND THE NON CO-OPERATION MOVEMENT

The College saw through the years of the First Great War (1914-18) without any marked change in its day to day life. During that period it welcomed some very distinguished visitor to its precincts. During the Christmas of 1916, the Viceroy of India, along with the then Director of Public Instructions, paid a visit to the College. The members of the

famous Sadler Commission visited the College on 29 November 1917. This was followed by a visit of the then Governor of Bengal in February 1919.

This unexpected attention of the Government to the College was not wholly benevolent. Actually, at this time the College was on the black-list of the Police and the bureaucracy, and spies in plain dresses, were in numbers among the students. In such a difficult situation the tact and wisdom of the Founder-Principal and the unsparing efforts and watchfulness of a band of self-less and patriotic teachers and employees went far to save the College from the onslaught of the foreign rulers.

BANGABASI COLLEGE STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION, PROFESSORS' UNION AND THE NON CO-OPERATION MOVEMENT.

The Non co-operation Movement (1920-22) threw the academic life of the country into a turmoil. For two brief periods, one in December 1921 and another in January 1922, the College had to be closed down for some time. Already the students had begun to feel that organized movement was the need of the day for protecting themselves and their rights from invasion by the world's mightiest imperialist power. There was also the need for promoting and protecting their legitimate interest through effective negotiation with the College administration. Mainly to serve these twin purposes, the Students' Association of the College was formed in 1919. Again, to make it a better instrument for fight, the Association was reorganized and given a new life in 1927. Under the inspiring guidance of Prof. Nripendra Chandra Banerjee, who was invited by Acharya G. C. Bose to join the English Staff of the College in 1926 after he had given up the post of Vice-Principal of the Chittagong

Government College in 1921 at the call of Gandhiji during the Non co-operation Movement. Official recognition to the Students' Association came in 1930.

Meanwhile, the Professors also formed a Union of their own in 1919 to strengthen the bond of unity and fraternity among them as well as to facilitate united action against attack on their rights and interests from any quarter.

POPULARITY OF THE SCIENCE COURSE

The academic life of the College slowly revived after the passing off of the Non co-operation storm. Meanwhile, the popularity of the Science Course of Studies was on the increase, attracting students from far and near. The results of the University Examinations were excellent, the candidates sent up by the College being able to occupy several positions among the first ten successful candidates. This was mainly because of the magic spell in the teaching of a good number of scholarly teachers led by such legendary names as Profs. Ladlimohan Mitra, Sukhendra Kumar Ray, Promode Chandra Sen, Shyamapada Chakrabarty, Nirendranath Ray, Anutosh Das Gupta and Sahayram Bose among others.

As the College prospered, adequate arrangements were sought to be made for housing and equipping a Library worth the name. In 1918, the Library was shifted from a small room of the Botanical Laboratory to a spacious room in the first floor. Its stock was also increased.

In 1927, Prof. Jitendranath Chakrabarty, who had already made his mark as a very successful and popular teacher of English, was appointed the first Vice-Principal

of the College. Prof. Chakraborty held this post with distinction till his death in 1947.

EPIC FAST UNTO DEATH

The name of Sri Jatindra Nath Das will shine forever bright in the annals of the struggle for India's freedom. He was a student of 4th year B. A. Class of Bangabasi College and a popular President of its Students' Union as well as the Assistant Secretary of the South Calcutta Congress Committee, when on 14 June 1929, he was arrested in connection with the Lahore Conspiracy Case. He was brought to Lahore Central Jail for trial.

Along with several other political prisoners there, Jatindra Nath commenced hunger-strike on 23 July 1929 as a protest against the inhuman treatment meted out to under-trial political prisoners in the country. After undergoing fast for 63 days with a courage and resolution which finds a parallel only in those of Macswiney of Ireland, this great son of India left this mortal world on 13 September 1929. The entire country burst into a towering rage at this tragic death and organised protest demonstrations which gave a trying time to the imperialist police. In Calcutta as a historian recalls, "...a two-mile long procession followed his bier...." Amrita Bazar Patrika also wrote that Calcutta had not seen a greater or more imposing procession of mourners since the funeral procession of C. R. Das.

Since his death, the 13th of September is being observed every year as 'Jatin Das Day' by the staff and students of the College in sad and sweet remembrance of a dear departed—a noble soul embracing a martyr's death in his prime for the liberation of the motherland.

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT AND THE COLLEGE

The storm of the Civil Disobedience Movement burst upon the Indian sub-continent during 1930-1934. The reaction of the Government took the form of brutal torture inflicted upon the Indians—men, women and children indiscriminately. Bangabasi College had also its share of sufferings and there had been times when police sergeants with revolvers and batons rushed into College classes and even into the Founder-Principal's chamber. On all such occasions, teachers and students stood up resolutely in resistance against such inroads, braving all risks hazards.

THE NEW PRINCIPAL

A new chapter was opened with Prof. Prasanta Kumar Bose, the youngest son of the Founder and an ex-student and a teacher of the College, taking charge as the Principal at the age of 28 years on 2 July 1934, one year after he returned home having obtained Honours degree in English Literature and Language from Oxford. Acharya G. C. Bose was now appointed Rector, a post from which he guided the young Principal, in his work, till his (the Rector's) death on the New Year's Day of 1939.

The entire burden of administration now fell upon the young Principal who, with the active co-operation and assistance of his band of tried and trusted colleagues, was able to steer clear of all obstacles that came his way before he was comfortably settled in the saddle.

One cannot draw a curtain over this phase of the College without mentioning the role of a noble lady in its origin and development. The reference is to Smt. Nirad Mohini Bose to whom Giris Chandra was married in 1877.

It is the active help and constant encouragement of that venerable lady, Nirad Mohini, the worthy consort of Shri Giris Chandar Bose which sustained this great man of vision in all his creative endeavours, specially when the going was hard for various reasons.

WAR, FREEDOM AND THE COLLEGE

The years following independence were marked by a flowering of social economic and cultural activities in India. But there was hardly any sphere where this kind of change was more profoundly felt than in the realm of education. This was evident from a sharp rise in the number of educational institutions from 2.3 lakhs to 6.9 lakhs, with an ever-increasing number of students over-crowding their portals. Bangabasi College did not fail to get her deserved share in the form of vibrant enrolment which carried her far on the wings of progress.

There was another factor which contributed remarkably to the expansion of this College. The partition of Bengal created a flutter on either side of the Radcliffe Line which swelled the ranks of students in this part of Bengal through a heavy influx from the other side. Bangabasi College benefited immensely from this mass migration of young learners.

Except for a short interlude in those dangerous days of war in 1942 when the scare of Japanese bomb virtually emptied the City, inevitably casting its darkest shadow on the roll strength of the institution, the history of the College specially since the 'forties had remained for long one of steady and uninterrupted progress in all aspects of life. Incidentally, in 1942, following the bomb scare, a branch

of the College was opened at Kusthia (now in Bangladesh) with Prof. Anil Kumar Ray Choudhury as Professor in-charge. The branch was, however, closed down after the war.

THE COLLEGE GROWS FROM MORE TO MORE

The year 1947 was memorable in the life of the College for several reasons. There was great expansion of the College as separate I. Sc. classes were started in the morning and B. A. classes in the evening under initiative of Prof. Ladlimohan Mitra. These shifts were placed under the able supervision of Prof. Rajkumar Chakraborty and Prof. Satyananda Ray respectively, who later became Vice-Principal of their respective shifts.

Thus it is that when the country won its cherished freedom from alien rule, Bangabasi College set out in quest of its destiny with firmer steps and greater strength branching out into 'shifts' —Morning, Evening and Commerce. The parent College and its shifts were housed in the same buildings until the Bangabasi College of Commerce moved into a separate building owned by Bangabasi College-School at Santosh Mitra Square.

It is, again, in the same year that the College stepped into Diamond Jubilee year and the Diamond Jubilee was celebrated in 1948 in a manner befitting the solemn occasion. The Celebration was inaugurated by Chakrabarti Rajagopalachari, the first Indian Governor-General, in the historic Senate Hall of the University of Calcutta.

ACHARYA GIRIS CHANDRA SANSKRITI BHABAN

In 1950, a semi-autonomous department named

Acharya Girish Chandra Sanskriti Bhaban was set up in memory of the Founder under the aegis of the College for the promotion of research and Post-Graduate studies in Bengali Literature and Language. Post-Graduate classes in Bengali were started in the evening to prepare candidates for the M. A. Examination under the able guidance and supervision of Prof. Jagadish Bhattacharya. The Bhaban served its purpose admirably, but ultimately it had to be closed down for compelling reasons. During 1951-52, there was a huge exodus of refugees from East Pakistan to West Bengal. Bangabasi College organised a 'Smaranarthi Sevadai' which opened three transit camps, one each at Sealdah, Bongaon and Dhubulia. The services of our students in these camps which operated for more than a year were appreciated by the Governments of India and West Bengal.

In the late 'fifties the roll-strength of the College (inclusive of the Shifts) touched a new high of about 9000 students. For a while the College hummed with activities in all directions specially in the field of sports, winning tournaments and annexing cups and shields, thus carving out a place for it in the sports-world.

PLAYGROUND, PAVILION AND GYMNASIUM

It merits a special mention that in 1954, the College secured a play ground of its own in the Maidan and a beautiful pavilion, the first pavilion in the Maidan for any Calcutta College, was constructed there for the benefit of the students. In the same year, the gymnasium of the College was equipped with modern instruments under the guidance of Sri Nilmoni Das (Iron-man), an alumnus of the College, who was then the Physical Instructor.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS

Bangabasi College was pioneer in opening degree courses in Bio-Science from 1947-48. On the academic side, the record was excellent—something to be proud of specially at the Intermediate level. Precisely, year after year the students sent up by the College occupied top positions in the University Examinations and many of them in later life held most distinguished positions in different spheres of national and international life. To raise the academic standard more and more, the College secured affiliation upto the Honours level in Humanities in different subjects, like Economics, Political Science, Philosophy and Bengali; the College had already been enjoyed Honours affiliation in English, Sanskrit and Mathematics. Then followed affiliation in Science subjects like Chemistry, Physics and Zoology. Thus the College concentrated its attention in developing both humanistic and scientific studies. Side by side with this academic excellence, the students of the College were in the forefront of Students' Movements over issues connected with their own well-being as well as that of their country.

The G. C. Bose Biological Research Unit, established during the mid-'fifties under the guidance of Prof. S. B. Ghosh, the Head of the Department of Zoology was a unique research laboratory where a number of the teachers of Bangabasi College completed their Ph. D. works.

THE PHILIP'S COMMITTEE OF THE UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION

Though the College benefitted immensely by the mass emigration of young learners from the other side of Bengal, the resulting expansion of this as well as other colleges of its kind had an adverse effect on it. Administrative

ingenuity was soon overwhelmed by the burden of growth. Inevitably, deterioration set in. Overcrowding had started telling on the academic life in many ways. There was a decline in the teacher-student ratio. Dearth of instructional facilities restricted the scope for creative work both for teachers and students resulting in erosion of discipline at all levels.

This state of things continued till the second half of the 'fifties, when the Philip's Committee of the University Grants Commission presented a scheme for the phased reduction of roll-strength of the big seven colleges of Calcutta of which Bangabasi College was one.

THE COLLEGE IN CRISIS

Under this phased reduction scheme the Government worked out a scale of compensation to be paid to Colleges coming under it. The roll-strength of each college was scaled down and fixed. The College concerned was called upon to bring down its student strength to that level in a phased way. At every phase the Government was committed to pay the extent of fall in revenue due to reduction of roll-strength under the phased reduction scheme or the actual deficit whichever is less.

Bangabasi College, which was to come under this scheme in 1960-61 did not elect to do so before 1964-65. As a result, a financially buoyant institution now became sick. The Employees' Provident Fund was depleted of a very heavy sum, covering one-half of the total. There was irregularity in the payment of staff-salary. Addition to Library stock or even replacement of worn out equipments became an impossible proposition. The construction of an

annexe of the College building stopped half-way for paucity of fund.

The teachers and non-teaching staff of the College and the cause of education suffered most. They pleaded for 'splitting' the Shifts into autonomous units as was done by other colleges by 1960 or so. But Bangabasi College effected the split in 1964-65. Even then the split was far from complete. Vital financial and other links remained alive between the mother and the progenies, perhaps to the detriment of the interest of both. The ardent plea, again of the members of the staff, for rational redistribution of personnel between Bangabasi College and its off-springs at the time of split was of no avail. The only inevitable result was the gradual sinking of the Day-College under an extra-ordinary financial burden.

CHANGE AT THE HELM

Meanwhile on 11 November 1972, Sri P. K. Bose, a soft-spoken Oxford Scholar known as much for his flair for teaching English poetry as for the humility and geniality of his charming personality, retired on superannuation from the high office of Principal which he adorned for over 38 years through thick and thin. After Principal Bose's retirement Prof. Sudev Bhusan Ghose, the then Vice-Principal and Head of the Zoology Department, as well as an ex-student of the College and a grandson of Acharya G. C. Bose took charge as Principal at the height of crisis. He showed considerable courage and patience in going through a trying time, but, with the College-funds already empty, it was hardly possible for him to do anything to stop the side down the slope. He never failed, however, to express his sympathy for the sufferings of the College staff.

However, there came about a big change in the financial position of this, as well as all other colleges of West Bengal when the State Government introduced the 'Pay Packet' scheme. But by then the term of Principal Ghosh was almost over. He was succeeded on 15 January 1980 by the present incumbent, Principal Bishnu Bera on whom has now fallen the responsibility of placing this great centre of higher education on an even keel. During the tenure of Principal S. B. Ghosh, College Science Improvement Project (COSIP) was introduced in the College by U. G. C. towards the development of Science teaching. From 1974-75 session, B. Com. Degree Course has been introduced in the College. On assuming charge, one of the first things that the present Principal had sought to do was to remove the long standing academic imbalance caused by the absence of Honours course in subjects like History, Botany and Commerce. His earnest efforts in this direction have started paying off. with orders (affiliation) for opening Honours in Commerce already in hand.

Resuming the thread of narrative, the teachers and non-teaching employees of the College faced with a severe crisis threatening the very survival of the institution, met the State Education Minister and members of the Advisory Committee on Higher Education on 14 December 1973 armed with a resolution of Teachers' Council adopted at its meeting on 8 November 1973. In terms of this resolution, the deputation demanded State take-over of the College to be followed by a thorough probe into its finances. The Teachers' Council also led a deputation to the President of the Governing Body and appraised him of the resolution of the Council referred to above.

In this context matters came to a head on 23 December 1973. On that day the College Governing Body unanimously adopted a resolution under the Chairmanship of late Shankar Prasad Mitra, then Chief Justice of Calcutta High Court, in which it pleaded that it had nothing to fall back upon to meet its obligations connected with the running of the College and it called upon the Government either to pay its outstanding claim for Rs. 17.50 lakhs under the phased reduction scheme within a month or to take-over its management. The resolution further said that the Governing Body was prepared to submit to any investigation considered necessary to ascertain the truth or otherwise of its financial statements.

Equally prompt was the response of the then State Education Minister, who categorically denied that the College had any outstanding financial claim against the Government.

Following these developments, the Advisory Committee recommended action basically along the line suggested by the College staff as regards appointment of a high-powered probe committee and stressed the need for the supersession by the Calcutta University of the Governing Bodies of the four colleges of the Bangabasi College Group to facilitate the probe.

The Government accepted the recommendations. The University was approached, which replaced the four Governing Bodies by ad-hoc Committees. It is due to the movement of the College staff with the active support of the West Bengal College and University Teachers' Association that the Government soon set up a high-powered probe committee with Sri G. C. Shaw, the then Sherif of Calcutta

as Chirman, Sri S. K. Sen Gupta, an Assistant Secretary of the Education Department as member-Secretary and Prof. Rabindranath Bhattacharyya of the Jadavpur University and Prof. Anadinath Daw of the University of Calcutta as members to go into the affairs of Bangabasi College according to certain specific terms of reference.

REPORT OF THE ENQUIRY COMMITTEE

The Enquiry Committee, after a series of meetings, interviews and deliberation at various levels submitted its reports which vindicated the contention of the College staff regarding the genesis and development of the crisis as delineated earlier.

The Committee in this report also held that the Trust Deeds of Bangabasi College did not contain any terms and conditions which created any special privilege for the Board of Trustees and as such the constitution of the Governing Body of Bangabasi College (Day) and the three splinter units should be governed by Section 93 and not by Section 100 of the Calcutta University First Statutes 1966. That was in fact the view of the College staff from the very beginning.

THE TAKE-OVER AND AFTER

The Government of West Bengal, on the basis of the report of Enquiry Committee, took over the administration of Bangabasi Group of Colleges by legislation in 1978 temporarily for two years. Prof. Amitesh Chandra Banerjee, formerly Inspector of Colleges, University of Calcutta, and Prof. Pravat Kr. Goswami of Bijoygarh College were appointed Administrator and Deputy Administrator respectively. During their tenure, Honours Course in Anthropology

was started, the College buildings were repaired out of Government grants for the purpose and the downhill movement of the College finance was arrested.

The period of temporary take-over being over, the University of Calcutta appointed Sri S. M. Bhattacharyya as administrator of Bangabasi Group of Colleges. After two years of University administration the Government of West Bengal initiated a bill which was unanimously passed by the State Legislature for permanent take-over of the Bangabasi Group of Colleges, but the bill still awaits President's assent. However, the four colleges of the Bangabasi Group are today run by four separate Governing Bodies constituted under Section 93 of the Calcutta University Statute.

THE STATE GOVERNMENT ACCEPTS P. F. LIABILITIES

It was indeed a great moment in the lives of the members of the staff of the College when a few months ago the Government of West Bengal, in an unprecedented gesture of goodwill, accepted the liabilities of the Bangabasi College Employees' Provident Fund, thereby removing a seemingly insuperable barrier separating them from their legitimately earned terminal benefits.

THE EPILOGUE

Three scores and ten form the normal span of life of a human being-so says the Bible. But things made by man are often destined to live longer. This is specially true of an educational institution with a perennial spring of vitality as the Bangabasi College. It set itself the goal of a deep commitment to expanding the frontier of knowledge on the day it was born and it has seldom faltered since then in

its noble mission of lighting the lamps of learning in every nook and cranny of our society. It had, no doubt, an humble beginning but the conception that went into its creation was great and the vision that stood behind it was inspiring. The idea was to make college education cheap, so as to make it accessible to all. It would sound rather incredible that even today a student can read Degree Course in Arts in Bangabasi College for a monthly tuition fee of rupees eight !

The College has a chequered history, having known ups and downs in its long career. But never for a moment, not even in the darkest hour of its life, has it forgotten the promises it has to keep. During the days of alien rule, it served as an asylum for political sufferers—students and teachers. It is a familiar fact, as Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose himself recalls in his 'Indian Pilgrim,' that when the doors of most of the Calcutta Colleges were shut against him he thought for a while of joining this College.

Generations of teachers and students will come and go, but the Institution will go on fulfilling with unflinching determination the noble mission destiny has entrusted it with. Leaves wither but the tree stands, individuals drop off but the institution lingers to realise its unredeemed pledge to the future. Let the ALMA MATER live forever !