

## **Some Defining Events in the Biography of the University (1857-2017)**

- The idea of establishing a university in Calcutta was first mooted by the Council of Education in 1845 which suggested that in view of the 'advanced state of education' in Bengal, it was advisable to have a full-fledged university empowered to grant degrees to deserving students. Accordingly it drew up an elaborate scheme modelled on the University of London. Nothing came out of it, at least at that moment.
- In 1853, C.H. Camerson, the President of the Council of Education submitted a petition to the House of Lords. Herein he revived the idea of a university.
- A similar petition signed by Raja Radhakanta Deb and others on behalf of the members of the British India Association and others was also submitted in 1853.
- The Education Despatch of 19 July, 1854, popularly known as Wood's Despatch, had really cleared the path for setting up of universities. Wood, as the President of the Board of Control of the East India Company, was indeed interested in education, but he had a certain purpose. As he wrote to Lord Dalhousie, the Governor-General in India, although he accepted the idea of founding universities in India, he wanted these "to be mainly supported by those who are anxious for it". He added that "if they choose to educate themselves, well and good, but I am against providing our own future detractors, opponents and grumblers".
- It was decided that the University of London was to serve as a model. The proposed university was to consist of a Chancellor, a Vice-Chancellor and Fellows who would constitute a Senate. The Senate would have the authority to manage the funds of the university and to frame regulations for examinations. The functions of the university would be to hold examinations and confer degrees. In the despatch it was explicitly stated that the examination for degrees should not include any subjects connected with religious belief.
- On 27 June, 1855, The Court of Directors directed the Governor-General-in-Council to commence work. Meanwhile, the Government of India had set up a committee for preparing a scheme for the establishment of the universities in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. Gordon Young, the Director of Public Instruction in Bengal was appointed Secretary of the committee that was split up into five subcommittees. One prepared the draft of a bill for incorporation while another prepared draft rules for examinations for granting degrees and for other cognate matters in the Faculty of Arts. Three other subcommittees undertook similar work in the Faculties of Medicine, Law and Civil Engineering.
- The University Act (Act No. II of 1857) was passed by the Legislative Council and received the Governor-General's assent on 24 January, 1857. This was indeed the foundational legislation in the history of the University of Calcutta. Altogether forty persons were named as Foundation Fellows.
- Viscount Canning became the first Chancellor and Sir James William Colville the first Vice-Chancellor of the University of Calcutta. The Chancellor, the Vice-

Chancellor and the Fellows together formed one 'Body Politic and Corporate by the name of the University of Calcutta'. The Body Corporate had the power to hold and dispose of any property vested in it for the purpose of the University. They were to constitute the Senate.

- The Entrance Examination was conducted by the University for the first time in 1857. Among two hundred and forty four candidates who applied for the Entrance, ten were from the Delhi College and the rest from Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. One hundred and fifteen were placed in the first division.
- The first B.A. Examination was held early in 1858. The Board recommended "that two candidates, viz., Bankim Chunder Chatterjee and Judoo Nath Bose.... be allowed to have their degree, being placed in the second division". The M.A. Examination was held for the first time in 1861.
- The almost sub-continental jurisdiction of the University of Calcutta was gradually curtailed, first in 1882 when undivided Punjab and N.W.F.P. and British Baluchistan went to the Punjab University and then again in 1887 when United Provinces, Central Provinces and adjoining areas passed into the hands of Allahabad University.
- Walter B. Granville, Calcutta's leading Victorian architect of that time, designed the Senate House. Once completed, it became the most visible symbol of the University and a veritable landmark in the 'City of Palaces'. It was constructed at a cost of Rs 4,34,697 and was formally inaugurated on the convocation day: 12 March, 1873.
- Premchand Roychand, a Parsi millionaire of Bombay, made an unconditional offer of Rupees two lakh. The fact that this liberal offer came from Bombay testifies to the sub-continental span of the University of Calcutta from the very beginning. The first recipient of the Premchand Roychand studentship in 1868 was Asutosh Mukhopadhyay (not the future Vice-Chancellor) and was followed by many eminent scholars. Other early donors included Prosunno Coomar Tagore, Eshan Chandra Bose, the Maharaja of Vijianagram, Harischandra Chaudhuri of Mymensing, Maharaja Nilmoni Singh Deo of Pachete and a few trusts.
- The first honorary degree of Doctor of Law was conferred on the Prince of Wales at a special convocation held on 3 January, 1876.
- The changing social basis of the educated classes widened during this period. Henry Sumner Maine, the eminent jurist and the fourth Vice-Chancellor of the University admitted this in 1866: "The fact is, that the founders of the University of Calcutta thought to create an aristocratic institution; and, in spite of themselves, they have created a popular institution".
- In 1883, the degree of Bachelor of Arts of the University of Calcutta was conferred on two students of the Bethune College-Kadambini Ganguli and Chandramukhi Basu. They were the first two lady graduates of the University.
- Gooroodass Banerjee became the first Indian Vice-Chancellor in 1890.

- In 1891, two nominees of the graduates – Jogindrachandra Ghosh and Mahendranath Ray – took their seats as the first elected Fellows of the University.
- Indian Universities Commission was appointed in January, 1902. Thomas Raleigh, the then Vice- Chancellor of the University of Calcutta was its President. Its members initially consisted of Syed Hossain Bilgiram, J.P. Hewett, Alexander Pedlar, A.G. Bourne and D. Mackichan. Curzon later included Gooroo Dass Banerjee as an afterthought. Based on the recommendations of the Universities Commission, the government drafted The Universities Bill. Banerjee differed from the majority opinion and submitted a note of dissent.
- On 1 May, 1903, Kalichurn Banerjee was appointed the first whole-time Registrar of the University. Shortly thereafter, the Indian Universities Act was enforced on 1 September, 1904.
- Asutosh Mookerjee was appointed Vice-Chancellor in 1906. During his long tenure (1906-14) the University became a full-fledged teaching institution. Minto Chair in Economics (1908) and posts of King George V Professor of Mental and Moral Science and Hardinge Professor of Mathematics were created. University Press and the University Library were set up (1908); Law College was established (1909) and many distinguished teachers were appointed.
- Taraknath Palit's munificence led to the creation of two Professorships, one in Chemistry and the other in Physics. The first holder of the Palit Chair in Chemistry was Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray and in Physics was Sir C.V. Raman.
- Rashbehari Ghose placed in the hands of the University a gift of ten lakh Rupees. The University instituted, among others, four Professorships, one each in Applied Mathematics, Chemistry, Physics and Botany.
- The foundation stone of the building designed for the University College of Science at 92, Upper Circular Road was laid on 27 March, 1914.
- The Syndicate, at its meeting on 28 October, 1913 resolved to confer the honorary degree of Doctor of Literature on Rabindranath Tagore, along with Paul Vinogradoff, Sylvain Levi, Rashbehari Ghose and others.
- The Commission, headed by M.E. Sadler, Vice- Chancellor of the University of Leeds, submitted its report to the government in 1919. In this eight-member Commission the two Indian members were Sir Asutosh Mookerjee and Dr. Zia-ud-din Ahmad of Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College, Aligarh. Apart from suggesting a thorough overhaul of the structure, it recommended that the Governor of Bengal and not the Governor-General should be the Chancellor.
- The government created a few more universities at Patna (1917), Rangoon (1920) and Dacca (1921).
- Kumar Guruprasad Singh of Khaira donated fund for five Chairs, one each in Indian Fine Arts (named after his wife Rani Bagiswari), Phonetics, Physics, Chemistry and Agriculture.

- In 1921, when Brajendranath Seal was appointed the Vice-Chancellor of Mysore University, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan was selected in his place as George V Professor of Philosophy.
- Asutosh again became Vice-Chancellor in 1921. He was offered another term in 1923 under conditions which Asutosh found unacceptable. He wrote back to the Bengal Governor, "I send you without hesitation the only answer which an honourable man can send, an answer which you and your advisers expect and desire: I decline the insulting offer you have made to me".
- The University attracted eminent educationists and scholars from different parts. Apart from stalwarts like C.V. Raman, Nilratan Sircar, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan or Prafulla Chandra Ray, new entrants to its portal included Dineschandra Sen, Sunitikumar Chatterjee, Hiralal Halder, H.C. Roychaudhuri, D.C. Sarkar, Harendra Coomar Mookherjee, Surendranath Sen and a host of others who had made their mark in their respective fields and had won many accolades for the University.
- In 1926, the Asutosh Building was formally opened.
- In 1934, Syamaprasad Mookerjee became the Vice-Chancellor. At the age of 33, he became the youngest Vice-Chancellor of the University. During Syamaprasad's tenure the University opened the Teachers' Training Department in 1935 and the Asutosh Museum of Indian Art in 1937.
- In 1937, Rabindranath was requested to compose a song which was to be adopted as the University song. Rabindranath responded to the request by composing two songs instead of one. These were: *Chalo Jai, Chalo Jai* and *Shuvo Karmapathe Dharo Nirvayo Gaan*. It was in 1937 that the poet addressed the Convocation in Bengali.
- In 1940, the University Press and Book Depot was set up on Hazra Road. In 1945, the Institute of Nuclear Physics was founded under the inspired leadership of Professor Meghnad Saha.
- In 1947 Chakravarti Rajagopalachari became the first Indian Chancellor of the University.
- In 1951, with the passing of the West Bengal Secondary Education Act, the University severed its historic link with school-leaving examination.
- In 1951, the Government of West Bengal passed the Calcutta University Act which replaced the earlier act of 1904. Apart from providing closer coordination of the colleges under the University, it ensured a democratic structure of the University. This was again to be replaced by Calcutta University Act of 1979.
- Emerging areas of scientific research, e.g. Nuclear Physics, Radiophysics and Electronics, Biophysics, Molecular Biology and Genetics, Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, Plant Science and Cell Biology, Microbiology, Atmospheric Science, Environmental Science, Information Technology and Computer Applications have been introduced as courses of studies. Moving into new areas does not, of course, imply marginalisation of basic science. In fact a balanced mix between the two has been envisaged.

- In the fields of Social Sciences, Language and Literature, the achievements of the University has always been commendable. While subjects like Economics, History, Philosophy, Comparative Philology or Modern Indian Languages have a long and established tradition, relatively new departments such as Ancient Indian History and Culture (1932), Political Science (1948) or Sociology have also carved out their niche in the academic map. New centres, named after Gandhi or Nehru have been created, Centre for Social Sciences and Humanities has been set up and DSA support has been extended to a large number of departments.
- The NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation Council) conferred Five Star Status on the University of Calcutta in 2001.
- On November 10, 2005, The Times Higher Education Supplement published its list of world's top arts and humanities universities. University of Calcutta is the only Indian university to make it to the top 50 list.
- Dr. B.C. Guha Centre for Genetics Engineering and Biotechnology was established on March 22, 2005 to mark the beginning of an entirely different chapter in the history of the University and its research and teaching programme in applied bioscience.
- The University Grants Commission has recognised the University's potentials for excellence by conferring on it '**University with Potential for Excellence**' status.
- On 17 January, 2006, the year-long Post Centenary Golden Jubilee Celebration was inaugurated by the President of India.
- With the financial assistance of the Ministry of Human Resource Development the University established the Centre for Research in Nanoscience and Nanotechnology in June 2006.
- Set up in 2007, the Centre for Studies in Book Publishing (CSBP) at the University of Calcutta represents a new genre of multi-disciplinary academic endeavour and is the first of its kind which focuses on the study of book publishing in India.
- Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy was set up in 2007 with the objective of multi-disciplinary collaborative research and publication.
- TEQIP is a World Bank funded project for the improvement of the quality of the technical education in the whole country. The University of Calcutta is one of the three premier institutes selected for taking the responsibility to upgrade the teaching quality in the engineering disciplines in West Bengal under this Programme.
- The Administrative Staff College, perhaps the first of its kind, was set up in 2009 for imparting training to the non-teaching staff of the University.
- In 2009 the National Assessment and Accreditation Council has re-accredited the University with Grade A.
- According to 2009 assessment of the Top Asian Universities, University of Calcutta ranks third within the Indian universities ([www.topuniversities.com](http://www.topuniversities.com))

- With the Sponsorship of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, the University established the Institute of Foreign Policy Studies on 25 February 2010, to conduct research and training programme in the realm of foreign policies, especially, on issues concerning India's relationship with her South Asian neighbours, South East Asia, and West Asia.

The UGC identified the University's Academic Staff College (UGC-Human Resource Development Centre) as West Bengal's only 'State-of-the-Art College'.

- The QS World University Rankings (2014) accorded the University the 2nd Rank among Indian Universities within the BRICS countries.
- The India Today-Nielsen Survey of 2015 accorded the 1st rank to the University among all state universities, and the 2nd position among all state and central universities of the country, taken together.
- In 2015-2016, the University of Calcutta was declared one of the four Indian universities selected by the Government of India for the *Connect to India Programme*.
- The University was recognized as one of the designated Indian universities for implementing the Australian Government's New Colombo Plan
- In 2017, the University has secured 6<sup>th</sup> position among the Indian universities as per World University Rankings released by Times Higher Education for the subject of Life Sciences, 2018
- The University has secured top position with rank 10 among Indian universities in QS BRICS University Rankings, 2018.
- The University has contributed highest number of theses to ShodhGanga under UGC-INFLIBNET, as on 30 November, 2017.