CHAPTER VI

HIS EDUCATIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS

AND

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALCUTTA
6.0 Introduction

Long before Syama Prasad became the Vice Chancellor of the Calcutta University, the researcher found that, he had numerous educational contribution to his credit, especially in regard to the Calcutta University. This was due to the fact that he had watched his father from very close quarters, Sir Asutosh in dealing with the affairs of the university. His service to the University occupies a major portion of his public service.

Syama Prasad prayed fervently, that the University may for ever be pledged to disseminate truth in every sphere; train men in openness of mind and love of truth and freedom and to develop personalities capable of the largest service to our beloved motherland. Keeping this as his ideal, Syama Prasad tread on various functioning of the University, on which we take to be his educational contribution. The University was his second home, and it is only here that he opened out his heart and showed his duty and love for his Alma Mater. He said, that it was one of the greatest opportunity he got to serve in the truest interest, his University and motherland.

Syama Prasad served the University in various capacities, viz, a member of the Senate, president of various committees, and most importantly, as a Vice Chancellor. Under his tenure, the University from an examining body, became the centre for higher education and research. It became one of the renowned centres for advanced studies. He assured all, that there will be a sound policy on national education, which will in turn ensure a steady advance from lowest stage to the highest.

Syama Prasad paid most of his attention to University, because the education at this stage was not as diversified till then. He looked into every aspect of the University education system and tried to bring about reformation, where ever needed.

Besides education, he was very concerned with the welfare of the students, for which, he engaged the University to set up a Students Welfare Department. He highly stressed the need of physical education, games and sports. He wanted to
nationalise the entire education system, and was highly successful. The University had a special place in his scheme of educational activities with special reference to Bengal.

6.1 Syama Prasad’s Educational Contributions

It is worthwhile to mention that the educational contribution of Syama Prasad Mookerjee was very closely related to the various activities and developments of the University of Calcutta. This University was advancing with quite a pace during the later half of the 19th century. But, with Lord Curzon’s education mission in 1902, the Calcutta University was identified, among other Universities, as centre of sedition where young people built networks of resistance to the colonial dominance and rule.

Syama Prasad grew up along with the first hand experience of the working of the Calcutta University. He was very close to his father, Sir Asutosh Mukherjee, who in turn tried his best to groom Syama Prasad, so as to take up the reigns of the Calcutta University. So it was but natural that most of his contribution, especially educational, would be in regard to the University. Even when Syama Prasad was just a student, Asutosh talked with him about the various affairs of the University.

Upon Sir Asutosh’s death, Syama Prasad got elected to the University Syndicate at the age of only 21 years. He was so effectively trained in the affairs of the University, that from the very first day, he worked with great vigour and enthusiasm and of course, selflessly. At this time, the Calcutta University was already one of the greatest teaching Universities in the East. It had already a strong foundation of a research University as well.

Syama Prasad took upon himself, the duty of making this University the greatest seat of learning, alike Nalanda, in the Indian Empire. In keeping conformity with his father’s vision, he strived for absolute academic freedom in the University. For him Education was religion, where freedom was the very breath of its existence. Syama Prasad supported and followed his father’s saying, in regard to the university-- “Unalterable is my faith as to her bright future, because I feel she must
be a national organization, self-reliant, though bound in service to the nation, adapting herself to the manifold and varying demands of the community, from generation to generation.” (Mookerjee, Sir Asutosh, “A Diary”, pp.16)

Syama Prasad served the University as Vice Chancellor for two successive terms, appointed twice by the same Governor, Sir John Anderson. Even when he left the office of Vice Chancellor, he continued to serve his Alma Mater in various other capacities.

Regarding his educational contribution, he had laid down a vast list of things that needed special attention. He focused on certain objectives which he thought was absolutely true to the University.

First of all, he wanted to remodel the syllabus and courses of studies. He wanted to bring about a sound system of training and examination, so as to rouse the latent power in learners; strengthen their critical judgement and widen their capacity for thinking and application of knowledge to problem-solving.

Secondly, he wanted education to be imparted through the provincial language in all stages, without, of course, neglecting English. He took strong steps to introduce Bengali in the system as a whole. It was made the medium of instruction and examination at the secondary stage. Much later, when he fought for amendments in the Matriculation Examination, Bengali was accepted as a language for writing the examination, even at higher level. Infact, he also tried to introduce other regional languages to be used by non-Bengalees, at the Matriculation level. Also, a committee with the Vice Chancellor as Chairman, upheld that there should be no age bar for admission to the Matriculation Examination. It also put forward that Bengali, Urdu, Assamese, Oriya and Hindi were to be classed as major vernacular languages. Again, Honours courses in Bengali, Hindi and Urdu were introduced, and that too on a level of equality. Here it might be mentioned that Syama Prasad Mookerjee for the very first time in its history, introduced Science subjects in the Matriculation course, and later on it was taken up as a compulsory subject.
The point which needs to be discussed, is that Syama Prasad Mookerjee did not forget the educational opportunities tendered to girls. Though girls were not debarred from taking up all subjects open to boys, they were still given separate subjects like Sewing, Needlework, Music and Home Science.

Thirdly, at the instance of Syama Prasad, Bengali *Paribhasa* (equivalents) of scientific terms were prepared by experts. Alongside, an attempt was made to rationalize spellings of Bengali terms. Also, special series of various Bengali publications on various subjects was undertaken for the benefit of the masses. At the behest of Syama Prasad, within a few years, the University Press brought out a number of Bengali booklets written by competent authors on various branches of learning.

So, as Bengali was already accepted as the medium of instruction and examination, suitable text books in Bengali were prepared.

While appealing in a report to the Senate in 1932, Syama Prasad Mookerjee declared that it was high time that our mother tongue would not only be the medium in the Matriculation Examination, but also in the highest examinations in this University. Ultimately, it received the approval of the Government in 1935. So, it may be said, that this great work started by his father, Sir Asutosh Mookerjee in 1921, was achieved so many years after his death.

Fourthly, the Sadler Commission had already suggested the creation of a Board of Secondary Education, as a part of their scheme for the reconstruction of the University. It was settled that the financial assistance should come largely, in fact, almost entirely from the Government. In 1928, Syama Prasad moved a letter in the Senate requesting the Government on the scope of administration of the Secondary Board.

Fifthly, Syama Prasad as the Vice-Chancellor, introduced the training of teachers and a new department was opened for the purpose in 1935. For teachers who were unable to go through the full course, provision was made for vacation courses. A shorter training course than B.T. was also offered. From 1937, Syama Prasad made
special arrangements for training teachers in Science and Geography. Infact, in 1938, Teachers’ Training Certificate Examinationss were started in General Subjects, Science and Geography. In order to facilitate the new Matriculation syllabus, the B.T. regulations were revised. Syama Prasad tried his level best to improve the quality of teaching in all schools of Bengal.

Again, to facilitate the swelling number of readers as well as books, the Central Library of the University was shifted from the Darbhanga Building to the newly built third floor of the Asutosh Building; infact the working was re-organised on modern scientific methods, and to take it further, a post graduate teacher in the name of Nihar Ranjan Ray, was sent abroad for advanced training in library science, before he was given the responsibility of the entire University Library system.

Apart from the above, Syama Prasad introduced a military training course called the University Cadet Corps. He even initiated examinations and certificates for this course.

Another noteworthy contribution of Syama Prasad was the establishment of an Appointment and Information Board which served as an Employment Exchange for University students and ex-students. This counteracted with the policy of the Provincial Government’s reservation of jobs for the Muslims only.

Regarding the area of research work, Syama Prasad instructions for full support to be given to the scholars. It has been seen that many post-graduate students were carrying on original research work under the guidance of University teachers. Again, medals and prizes were awarded to as many as sixteen scholars on the results of their thesis.

Parallely, student exchange programmes were carried out successfully. Syama Prasad did not pay any less attention to the fact that education should be career-oriented; so he went for a re-orientation of total system with provision for sufficient funds. To do all these, he stressed that University should be autonomous in its administration.
Similarly he strongly felt that the doors of the University should be open to all—not only for the youths but to all adults as well.

Regarding the growth of scientific studies, Syama Prasad felt that, departments like Applied Chemistry, Physics, Biology, etc., needed to be reorganized, and which he did. He also felt that this was important for students to build industrial careers. He was always in search for initiating new departments, which would ultimately enhance the employment opportunity of the educated youths—and one of them was Communication Engineering.

Apart from all these, Syama Prasad did not neglect the subjects which were in the dark. Subjects like Chinese and Tibetan studies were brought forward to throw light on ancient Indian civilization, which was of great cultural importance.

Another provision he made was the holding of practical examinations of science subjects by the University for the first time. He was of the conviction that this would reflect on the quality of teaching at the higher stage.

Keeping in mind the importance of Indian culture, Syama Prasad made the Senate approve the creation of a Fine Arts Gallery and Museum mainly in connection with post-graduate studies, with special stress on the contribution of North Eastern India and Bengal.

He insisted that education was one of man’s fundamental right and pointed out that the education system should be absolutely integrated. At his behest, selected scholars were sent abroad with subjects such as, Banking and Currency organization, Standardisation of Drugs, Aromatic chemicals, Plant Physiology and Physical Chemistry. In addition to this, he personally helped in the publication of journals, six of which were the organisations of outside societies for advanced studies in chemistry, physics, mathematics, geology, geography and psychology.

Syama Prasad Mookerjee very rightfully felt that education should be imparted in such a way so as to prepare the youths for new vocations and avenues such as, the army, navy, trade and commerce and industry. For this, he arranged for varied
grades of scientific and technical knowledge. So, this could be taken as an outstanding educational contribution of his, towards India’s economic and industrial development. Side by side, agriculture formed a distinctive part of the work of the University and thereby increasing the productive power of land.

One of Syama Prasad’s outstanding contribution was the setting up of a department of Educational Research. He also wanted the students of this University to study and investigate Economics and Banking, specially in determining the position of this country in relation to foreign trade and competition. He very rightfully sighted that the aim of the Universities should be in respect of progressive expansion. As a corollary to his new field of studies, he always searched for new avenues of employment to absorb the educated youths.

In one of his convocation addresses, Syama Prasad stressed the instruction of sound liberal education to be provided by the colleges, and that too through the medium of mother tongue. In the Calcutta University, he made elaborate provisions for all major Indian languages. Also, at the post Matriculation stage, a candidate from outside Bengal could use his/her own mother tongue in the examination. This was held good in the M.A. examination as well. At the Matriculation level, non-Bengalees were not compelled to accept Bengali as the medium of their examination The University recognized that English will remain a compulsory second language and taught to all. Also, each province had its own major language and this had to be accepted in its own educational sphere. He said that a working knowledge of English at the post-elementary stage was sufficient for the ordinary purpose. Similarly, he instructed, that knowledge of Hindi was essential for direct contact among people of different provinces.

In addition to all the above educational contributions, an all important motion of Syama Prasad Mookerjee comes into the limelight. Of all the new projects, the scheme for the promotion of military studies among the students, actually laid the foundation in building up of national life and character.
6.2 Syama Prasad’s Activities related to Calcutta University

Syama Prasad Mookerjee, whether in the capacity of the Vice Chancellor of the University, or otherwise, laid great stress on the health and welfare of the Students. He highly supported and appreciated the work of the Students’ Welfare Department, which won the recognition from all quarters. He very rightfully said, that, “what is education if our youths in general are physically weak, unable to stand the stress of modern life?” (Educational Speeches, pp,17) The above said department, dealt with both the investigation as well as the curative side of the problem. The University took up the responsibility of providing medicines at a cheaper rate, spectacles, and similar things to the students. Besides the above activity, he encouraged the provision being made for sports, games and scientific physical education. One of his significant activity was the acquiring of a piece of land near the Dhakuria Lake, so as to set up the University Rowing Club for the teachers and students alike.

Syama Prasad was very active in arranging for a proper playground for the University. For this, he made arrangements with the Presidency college, for sharing the playground for two days a week, and which was made available to the students.

Next, he saw to it that more students came forward to join the University Training Corporations. The Bratachari movement also became very popular.

He felt that the University could very well organize a Central Bureau, that which will ensure the progressive welfare of students of Bengal. Herein, it might be mentioned that finance was all-important. Syama Prasad went ahead to set up a national fund, in the name of University Alumnus Fund, to which old students of the University was expected to contribute. The University of Calcutta was one of the first Indian University to start this.

Taking into account the then situation, Syama Prasad stressed that the University should open its doors to all and sundry. Alongside, the Department of Science published as many as six journals of scientific societies, aiming at the dissemination of knowledge throughout India. Also, the syllabus was revised,
especially of Medicine and Engineering, mainly to bring them into line with modern developments.

Syama Prasad, while working for the University, never forgot to throw his attention on the state of primary and secondary education. Actually, he wanted the primary education to lay a strong foundation and the secondary education in spreading liberal education, ultimately leading to a sound system of University education.

Syama Prasad, among his various policies regarding the University, wished the modern Indian scholar to have the training and vision in order to connect our ancient history and civilization with the then present situation.

Another very significant action that was taken up by him, was the provision of education at a very nominal cost, at every stage. On the other hand, he stressed that education should maintain its quality, otherwise the reconstruction of the entire system, would be defeated.

One of the most staggering features of Indian life was the illiteracy and ignorance. Till the time, Indians were not adequately trained to defend their own country. Syama Prasad was of the opinion that, if India was to win autonomy, then a national army and navy was an absolute neccessity. According to him, the University can play a vital role in rebuilding a new India; it may train the alumni in a worthy manner and instill in them unity and reason; inspire them with skill and knowledge, so as to devotedly apply themselves in the service of the nation. Syama Prasad wanted the University teachers to be the interpreters of India’s heritage and culture.

Syama Prasad very rightfully said that the College and University unions, along with goodwill and understanding, should prove a healthy training ground for future citizenship.

Another very outstanding activity of Syama Prasad regarding the University, was the tie between industrialization and the education system, along with finance and a national policy. He went on to say that, “Our University have their brains, their
laboratories and workshops, and in a very large measure they can deliver the goods.” (Mookerjee, S. Educational Speeches, pp. 70). So, he very strongly insisted that a state policy be formulated, so as to absorb the University students in the process of intensive industrialization and hence economic freedom.

He opined, rather demanded the inclusion of compulsory military training, fully related to mechanized warfare, under the Universities of India. He felt, that all Universities, including Calcutta University should train the youth to defend their own country.

During his time, the economic sufferings of the majority of our people were reflected in the attitude and outlook of the students. Hence, he suggested that grants of scholarships must be made on a more liberal basis for the backward sections, and ensure that poverty should not stand in the way of any deserving student from receiving the highest education.

Besides, all the above activities, a very novel step was taken up by Syama Prasad Mookerjee—that of celebrating the Foundation Day of his Alma Mater on 24th January. This was the very first time that Foundation Day was being celebrated. He believed that it would very well programme the building up of character and health of the students of the University. He expected that all institution with their chosen representative, could come under the banner of the University, and thereby, a scheme of co-operative work could be brought about. He was sure that if this unity and organization grows gradually, then that would help to create a new Bengal, a Bengal that was destined to lead and not led.

Syama Prasad also urged the University to establish an Employment Bureau, consisting of representatives of the Government of various commercial and industrial set ups, along with that of the University.

Another very significant contribution of his was the change of the University seal. During the 75 years of colonial rule, the University Seal carried the Arms of the East India Company. Later on, it was replaced by the Royal Arms. But, as a patriot that he was, Syama Prasad was in pain to see all this. He personally took the
initiative to change this, with the help of some inserted a full blown Lotus, with the word “Shree” in the centre. This new symbol could be seen in the University flag as well as in the official certificates.

But later, in 1937, due to some communal protest, Syama Prasad decided to remove the ‘Shree’ and insert, symbols of sunrays, a lotus and a lotus-bud at the centre. This action, he thought would bring about peace.

6.3 His Convocation addresses

The following are some of the convocation speeches given by Syama Prasad Mookerjee:

The name of Syama Prasad Mookerjee revolves around the very name of Calcutta University. As a member of the Senate and as the Vice Chancellor, his educational speeches inspired the then nationalists, who were prepared to frame a national system of education. The educational speeches were mostly delivered between 1935 and 1950, and which gave an impetus to the leaders who went on to build free India. Keeping in mind the then present situation and the future demand of the country, Syama Prasad Mookerjee emitted his brilliance as a critic and a progressive thinker. During the various convocations of Calcutta University, his speeches were of great educational value.

_Calcutta University Convocation ( 2\textsuperscript{nd} March, 1935 )_

Syama Prasad Mookerjee was appointed the Vice Chancellor in August, 1934, at the tender age of thirty-three. In his first address at the convocation, he went on to say about the immediate working of the University. Firstly, he said that the three departments of Post Graduate teaching in Arts, Science and Law should be under direct administration of the University. Secondly, the collegiate education of Assam and Bengal had to be properly supervised. He also realized that the University should conduct examination throughout the year in the faculty of Arts, Science, Medicine, Law, Engineering, Commerce, Teaching, etc., due to the fact that there was a huge number of examinees. Beside this, he ardently felt that the
health and welfare of the students was of great importance, for which the University could engage certain agencies. Though the above measures looked like routine work of the University, yet it was by no means an easy task to achieve, given the fact that it was high time the University activities were reorganized.

He goes on to mention that the remodeling of the Matriculation examination had, after fourteen years of struggle, received the agreement by the Government. The agreement sanctioned the usage of vernacular as the medium of instruction as well as in the examination. The Government also recognized the importance of attending the prevalent course of study, along with physical education and vocational training. It also claimed that there should be specified courses of study for girls.

During his address, he spoke about a massive task undertaken by the University, that is, the collection of materials for the Bengali text books in various subjects. The University, had appointed experts, whose task was to find appropriate words for technical and scientific studies, keeping in mind that the students who would undergo Matriculation Examination, will proceed for higher education, through the medium of English. So, to maintain a uniform standard, a co-ordination committee was formed.

At this very time, due to alterations of regulation in the Matriculation Examination, a demand for trained teachers was felt. He felt that the institutions in Dacca and Calcutta could not meet the demand, and so proposal for the provisions of teachers were put forward to the Senate. Considering the Post Graduate organization, various ways of improving the quality of its work in all direction, were looked into.

He very proudly declared that the Calcutta University possessed one of the finest library in the East. But he lamented that the students were unable to access its’ facility, satisfactorily. So, the Senate decided to construct the fourth storey of the Asutosh Building, to house the University General Library and the Post Graduate Lending Library. He proudly stated that University teachers in the affiliated
colleges were making valuable contribution to their specialized field. It was a notable fact that as many as thirteen graduates obtained the doctor’s degree in a span of twelve months. Syama Prasad declared that the University undertook a policy, wherein, some brilliant scholars were sent abroad for advanced studies. Simultaneously, distinguished scholars were invited from all over the globe, to deliver lectures in their own field, and thereby enrich the students of the University.

He further went on to say that collegiate education in Bengal should be stabilized so as to improve the quality of higher teaching and research. He lamented that the recommendation of the Sadler Commission were not implemented to the fullest. Syama Prasad voted for an overall re-orientation of the prevalent system, where, it will cater to all and sundry. For the above to happen, it was necessary to have enough funds, and reforms be made in a positive direction of expansion, and lastly, control should be autonomous and that too in the hands of formal academicians. Syama Prasad Mookerjee outlined various project in order to refashion the old system of education and make it appropriate to the demands of the present society.

He stated his feeling regarding the provisions of education, not only to the youth, but also to the adults.

He went on to say, “I cannot but emphasize the reality and the greatness of this need. In other countries there have been inaugurated in recent times, movements for giving to the adults of every class, the advantages of University education as far as practicable.” (Mookerjee, S. Educational Speeches. pp15) He stressed that, Bengal as a province, was an object of attention and attack from all quarters in India. So, the main task of the University would be to produce dedicated workers towards the service of the nation. According to him, it was the task of all Hindus, Christians and Muslims alike, to rescue Bengal from this state of stagnation. The future of Bengal lay in the hands of its young generation, who needed to be inspired by lofty ideals and education, and which will be compatible with true patriotism and hence become the trustees of national honour.

Syama Prasad Mookerjee dwelled into another very relevant sphere, that of the welfare of the students. The Students Welfare Department dealt with the investigating the cause of ill-health as well as the preventive and curative side of
the problem. He vouched for the supply of medicines, spectacles in a cheaper rate. He gladly announced the acquisition of a building near the Dhakuria Lake, courtesy the Calcutta Improvement Trust. What was needed was the careful channelization of youthful energy. The University should be vested with the great task of making the students, owners of sound moral character.

For all the above to achieve, Syama Prasad felt that the biggest obstacle was the availability of finance. But he hoped that he will get the support of the Government, University and the public. He suggested the establishment of an University Alumnus Fund, where all students, present and past might contribute. In the agreement of 1932, the entire income from fees were not given to the University. But Syama Prasad promised that he will make an appeal to the Government, so to have the full advantage of their increased income. He hoped that Government and the Legislative, will definitely restore the annual grant of Rs. 1,29,000 for the non-Government colleges in Bengal. He pledged to serve his Alma Mater to the fullest possible way.

**Calcutta University Convocation (22nd February, 1936)**

In this address, Syama Prasad Mookerjee categorically stated that the University carried on the duty of publishing the research studies of both teachers and students, and which have also been highly acclaimed by foreign journals and learned societies. That very year, the University had conferred the Doctorate degree to eight graduates in Arts, Science, Law and Medicine. In fact, about one lakh of rupees had been spent in awarding a total number of 85 scholarships and prizes to advanced Students and Fellows. To enrich these students further, the University invited distinguished personalities to deliver special lecture, from places like Turkey, Germany, America, Japan, Hungary, Dacca, etc. In fact, he took pride in mentioning that Dr. Radhakrishnan would speak on Comparative Religion, not forgetting to congratulate him for being appointed at Oxford.

He claimed that the Senate approved a very relevant scheme, that of the creation of Fine Arts Gallery and Museum. He thought that it would help the University to spread the patriotic consciousness of the youth towards Indian Art and Culture.
Another thing that the Senate did, was to include the teaching of Science at the Intermediate Level, both theoretical and practical. Till then, no practical examinations were held by the University. But, Dr. Mookerjee suggested that the University hold practical exam in case of Science Subjects in order to improve the quality of teaching at higher stages. Alongside the activities of the Science College, he sought to include the responsibility of raising the standard of work done in the affiliated colleges and also in providing new courses that will lead to new industrial careers. Parallely, with the Department of Applied Physics, provision have been made for the study of a new course, that is, Communication Engineering and which is expected to open new scope of employment.

He took up a very sensitive issue regarding the educational policy of his. There was a widespread criticism, that the University was educating a large number of students, and which eventually led to wastage of teaching arrangements as well as human skills due to the dearth of job opportunities. He went out to straighten out this fact. He put forward the picture that if nearly half of the candidates are successful at the Matriculation examination, then it is impossible for the University to stand in the way of those students, who aspire for higher education. It can never be said that if enrollment of students is high in the Universities, it puts forth a negative picture. According to him, educational opportunities at higher stage should never be condemned. He ofcourse maintained, that there definitely was educated employment, but the University, alone should not be blamed. He opined that if the Universities were well equipped and better organized, it is capable of bringing about greater national prosperity. Further, there should be no conflict of ideals and aims, no domination of varied vested interacts, and no arbitrary dominance of authority. His ideal was to make the widest provision for a sound system of liberal education, to bring out synthesis between cultural education and vocational and technical training. Another task the University has, was to provide ample facilities to the teachers, so that, with their enhanced knowledge, they become the torch-bearers and also the makers of men, women, leaders, workers, who would be in turn true, brave, upright and patriotic. The University will go forward to link up education with our culture, drawing out the best from western and eastern knowledge. So, Syama Prasad pledged to bring together the University,
State and the educated public of all communities—in order to determine the path of future reforms most suited to our national development.

**Nagpur University Convocation (5th December, 1936)**

First and foremost, Syama Prasad was of the opinion that in order to make progress in the field of education, the weak points in the system should be rectified, and that too by sinking all differences. The Indian Universities should equip its alumni with individual fitness, in order to teach them how to merge their individuality in the common cause of advancing the prosperity of their motherland. He announced that new vocations, such as, Army, Navy, Trade, Commerce and Industry will receive due attention. Economics and Banking will be investigated. Education and Psychology will be the added attraction to the list of subjects offered. Infact, he promised that a department of Educational Research will be set up.

Among other things, he opined that education should be secular in character; ofcourse some amount of religious education should be imparted through the agency of home. He very aptly mentioned that, even after so many years of British rule, more than 90% of the Indians remained illiterate. Hence, the University trained youth should go forth and undertake the duty of directing the affairs of the schools, opened in the villages. Along with this intellectual pursuit, the physical standard of students should not at all be neglected. Syama Prasad very rightfully said that, “nothing is important to the success of an educational scheme than the selection of the right type of teachers—men who will act as the students’ guide, philosopher and friend.”

While addressing this University, Syama Prasad Mookerjee pressed the need of political freedom in order to bring about a national system of education. Again, he said that there should be less of poverty, disease and pestilence. Besides these, he wanted the State to spend much more on all stages of education. An elaborate system of elementary and secondary education should form a firm foundation for University education to flourish. To fulfill this, education should be as cheap as possible, while maintaining the quality. He requested private benefactors to come forward on a wider scale.
Calcutta University Convocation (17th February, 1937)

The principal address at this convocation was given by Rabindranath Tagore. This was at a time when the University had introduced the mother tongue as the medium of instruction. Syama Prasad Mookerjee gave his speech, which the researcher finds, revolved mainly around the significance of Bengali, in raising the intellectual level of this province. He very proudly announced that in the year 1937 a successful candidate, who wrote his thesis in Bengali, was awarded the degree of doctor of philosophy, for the very first time.

He also mentioned that selected teachers and students were sent to foreign Universities, to investigate various subjects of Arts and Science, with special attention to industrial and technical training. Along with this, many eminent scholars came from far and wide to throw light on various branches of study of Calcutta University.

The Students’ Welfare Department, the University Rowing Club had already gained ample popularity.

Dr. Mookerjee went on to announce the opening of the Department of Communication Engineering. Of course, he pointed out that the great problem of the University was the public awareness in respect of finding fresh vocation and avenues, for themselves. Hence, he pleaded that the scholars, trained in this University, should actually take the above task of reconstruction and thereby educate the public regarding these potentialities.

Bombay University Convocation (17th August, 1937)

At the very beginning, Syama Prasad Mookerjee declares that the future policy in respect to Indian Universities must be one of progressive expansion and not of short-sighted curtailment.

As against the argument of those who advocated the restriction of University education, Syama Prasad Mookerjee defended by saying that there was a need to provide sounder preliminary training, create fresh opportunities for work, so that it
absorbed the constructive energies of the University trained youths. He emphasized that the State should henceforth modify their policies so as to fully utilize their services in a productive manner. He reminded that education was no longer a luxury, as was the impression of a few.

He proclaimed that the students of Bombay University should strive for the increasing greatness of the presidency and be loyal to her and then to the motherland. He believed that Indian Universities were bound to play a noble part in the emergence of a new India, and thereby prevent degeneration. He expressed that the students should make a determined effort to promote the cause of Indian unity.

*Patna University Convocation Address (27th November, 1937)*

Syama Prasad Mookerjee firmly felt that India could never rise to her full stature, unless she gained independendence. India had progressed in many directions under the British rule though. For example, he felt that the benefits of Science, revolutionized the total civilization as such. Infact, Western education has helped to broaden the outlook of the Indians, as well as the sense of patriotism and political consciousness.

Dr. Mookerjee, while giving this convocation address, also stated that, alongside the progress, the health and welfare of Indians were in a deplorable state. India’s poverty was mainly due to the insufficient industrial policy forwarded by the foreign rule. 90% of Indians were still ignorant and illiterate. Syama Prasad Mookerjee also was of the opinion that a national army and navy was most needed to bring about autonomy in India. He stressed that adequate training should be provided. For this, he thought that the Indian Universities should play their role in rebuilding the country. The University alumni should be adequately trained—inspired by skill and knowledge. The teachers of the University should be the interpreters of the culture.
Calcutta University Convocation (5th March, 1938)

Syama Prasad Mookerjee was one of the first educationists who proclaimed that education was one of the fundamental rights of man. He stood for mass education on a national basis. He proved that Calcutta University was highly popular among the Indians - 3,000 students were studying in the departments of Arts, Commerce and Science and Law. In that year, nearly 50,000 students sat for the University examination. Parallelly to this, graduates were awarded the Doctor’s degree in subjects like Agriculture, Economics, Metaphysics, History and Chemistry. The scheme of sending students abroad was being successfully carried on for the investigating subjects like Banking and Currency Organization, Standardisation of Drugs, Education for the Blind, Aromatic Chemicals, Plant Physiology and Physical chemistry. Again, the University carried on the task of publishing books, journals and memoirs, contributed mainly by the scholars of the University.

The work of the Teachers’ Training Department was highly commendable. For the very first time, bona fide teachers were permitted to appear for the B.T. Examination as non-collegiate students. The scheme of expansion of women’s education under the Viharilal Mitra Trust was being pursued.

The new scheme for creating an Appointments Board was working very smoothly. Syama Prasad ardently pleaded for support from all Chambers of Commerce to assist in giving job opportunities for qualified Bengali youths trained at the University. Training was being given in Agriculture and Cottage industries as well, just to open new practical pursuits and benefits to the province as a whole.

Besides all the above, the Students’ Welfare Department extended its after-care work. Also, the Rowing Club and University Training Corps, at Syama Prasad’s behest, was strengthened considerably, as he was highly concerned with the health of the youth.

He mentioned that the Government grant had been revised, with the University receiving Rs. 4,85,000 a year. He confessed that University education in this country has been beneficiary; professions like Law, Medicine and Engineering had...
Educational Contributions…

rapidly grown. But the masses remained untouched. He proclaimed that a sound policy of national education was to be established, just to ensure a steady advance from the lowest to the highest stage. He wished to make all the stages of education impart knowledge through the language of the province, alongside English. Syama Prasad of course, did not forget the importance of providing worthy teachers to the cause of upbringing of the youth. He highly hoped that the University of Calcutta will inspire the hearts of thousands, a sense of loyalty and affection, which will sustain her in the process of fulfillment of her destiny.

Agra University Convocation (23rd November, 1940)

This address flourished at a time, when the World War II was continuously changing the position and working of various educational institutions, all over the world. India was also undergoing transition and Syama Prasad felt that the University education also needed to be re-oriented.

He was of the opinion that the Universities should not only be engaged in training students for professions and services. Instead, it should follow a scheme of education that will enable the Indian youths to revive their culture, whether in the social, economic or political sphere.

In British India, the Universities were treated as agencies to disseminate Western education; they were not seats of learning in the truest sense. Infact, nearly after 50 years of the establishment of the first University in India, did it become a teaching ground, where the advancement of knowledge was taken up as its primary objective. Herein, he stressed that education should be imparted through the medium of our own languages; the initial introduction of which will be a little tedious though. Without this, he thought that the building up of a national life would be next to impossible, as communication of ideas would suffer. He felt that the fullest development of the mind of a person is only possible through his natural communicative language. He pleaded that all Universities of India should recognize the different Indian languages; infact the Calcutta University had already made provisions for the study of all important Indian languages.
He very proudly announced that at the post Matriculation stage, a student from outside Bengal could write the examination in his or her own mother tongue. At the Matriculation level, non-Bengalees were given the option to write their examinations in Hindi, Urdu, Assamese. Others were offered English as their medium. Syama Prasad felt that these small steps would lead to the strengthening of the foundation of Indian nationhood. Alongwith this proposition, he suggested that English should remain a compulsory second language, so that books written in it could be utilized by our own students, for the assimilation of knowledge in the higher stage.

He very rightfully felt the need for a liberal and useful education, in order to make the youths fit, for the service of the nation. He said that, “True education should include the local idea, the national idea and the international idea.” (Mookerjee, S. Educational Speeches, pp. 97)

Another very significant factor that was taken into consideration, was the relationship of students with colleges and Universities. Herein, comes the concept of University and College Unions. Syama Prasad felt that the students should stay away from unwanted politics, that which interfere with their academic functioning. Nonetheless, the students should not be expected to be totally oblivious of the then current issues regarding their country’s liberty. He asked the students to cultivate the spirit of clear and critical thinking. He felt that the academic atmosphere could retain its freedom and sanctity only with the loyal assistance of the student population. He observed that the greatest objective of every University is to construct a man, whose deeds will benefit the community, nation and civilization, together. Syama Prasad rightfully commented, “Let men and women trained in Indian Universities of today unite in their efforts for the remaking of their Motherland.”

*Benaras Hindu University Convocation (1st December, 1940)*

Syama Prasad in his convocation address, mentions that Benaras Hindu University was an ancient seat of Hindu learning, and therefore, it had the great responsibility
Educational Contributions…

of reviving the glory of Indian culture. He paid his respects towards all the eminent philosophers and stalwarts, viz. Silbhadra, Shankaracharya, Shree Chaitanya, Tulsidas, and lastly to Pandit Malaviya. Syama Prasad requested the then Vice Chancellor to spread knowledge in diverse branches, so as to revive the glory of Hindu culture, which in turn will strengthen the root of nationalism and thereby bring back to India the political freedom. He thought that the University had a great role to play in reshaping the people’s destiny.

In this convocation address, he very effectively dismissed the argument that expansion of University education should be curtailed in the elementary stage itself and thereby avoid unemployment of educated youths in the future. On the other hand, he expressed the view that all elementary education should be crowned with a higher system; it would otherwise be meaningless. He opined that, no country can have a true national system of education, unless it enjoys the blessings of freedom.

Throwing light on the progress of science and industry in India as compared to other countries, he mentions that India was far lagging behind. He felt that the University science laboratories worked under great handicap. This happened primarily due to the fact that the Government had no proper policy of industrialization, and so did not in any way demand trained educated youths from the University. At this very time, the Second World War was in progress, and Syama Prasad Mookerjee took this opportunity to pressurize the foreign rulers to promote industrialization. Herein, he offered the service of the University in the process of industrialization, along with co-ordination between the University, Government and the industrialists. This would lead to the early attainment of India’s economic freedom.

Another direction on which Syama Prasad threw light was on the co-operation between the State and the India University, relating to adequate military training needed in the modern warfare. Hence, the University could demand provision for compulsory and mechanized military training. The then University Training Corps was absolutely inadequate. He further stressed that the Indian Universities were working under various limitations. But during that critical period, it was the duty of
the University to train the youths so as to make them fit to uphold the flag of Indian liberty. The Universities should educate the youths in such a fashion, so as to make them physically strong and morally unbreakable. He mentioned that nations live or die according to the character of the people. He pledged that our body and soul should be engaged to the preservation of the noblest ideals of our race and culture.

Gurukula Visvavidyalaya Convocation (25th April, 1945)

In this convocation, Syama Prasad put forth his idea of a national education. He stressed that the British system of education was not for the welfare of the Indians. According to him, Bentinck actually started an era of cultural conquest of the Indians. The gate of western knowledge was thrown open to Indians, at the cost of sacrifice of our own cultural heritage. Education during that time was encouraged not for its own sake but for opening various avenues of employment, essential for the functioning of the alien power. First of all, education without a proper outline and direction, could not proceed for freedom. Again, without freedom, the educational policy cannot be reshaped. Syama Prasad felt that all major provincial languages should be accepted in its own educational sphere; both in the field of instruction and examination up to the highest standard.

He requested all Universities to prepare books in all subjects of study in the various provincial languages. Apart from this, a working knowledge of English at the post-elementary stage was sufficient. Again, he stressed that a working knowledge of Hindi was essential to carry on direct contact among people of different provinces. He was of the idea that History, Economics and Social Science should be in relation to the Indian environment. He declared that India being a poor country, all expenditures should possibly be minimized, so that whatever fund was available, would be utilized for the progressive expansion of education. He claimed that instead of turning westwards, we can rebuild our society fundamentally on our own model. In a country like ours with varied religions and faiths, it is imperative to adjust our movements so as to permit full scope for intellectual and cultural development to all and sundry. He said that there was an ardent need of re-planning of a national system of education, with the aim of clearness and precision.
According to Syama Prasad, national education should be based on the following main principles:

(i) The national languages should be used as medium of instruction and examination to the highest stage.
(ii) The study of various subjects has to be reorganized.
(iii) There should be a very congenial relation between the teacher and the student.
(iv) Students should live in a condition in which they will be in touch with the outer world at large.
(v) A student should be aware of his own culture.
(vi) Synthesis between Indian civilization and true requirements of a scientific age.

Delhi University Convocation (13th December, 1952)

This address of Syama Prasad Mookerjee was his last testament on educational reforms. He went on to say that the U. G. C., set up by the Central Government was an urgent necessity, as, it his here that adequate funds are distributed in a systematic manner and on a national basis. After independence, the Universities needed to be conscious of their wider duties and responsibilities as before. He laid great emphasis on research activities in the Universities. He desired that, the basic sciences should be a common factor and specialization to be shared region wise.

Herein, in this very address, he gave a complete outline of the reforms that were necessary to enable the educational structure of India to serve the needs of free India. He laid special emphasis on the following factors:-

- Adequate state funding.
- It was important for the University to maintain adequate standards of interaction and examination. Wastage and useless duplication was to be avoided.
- There should be exchange of University teachers on a regular basis; student exchange programmes should also be carried on.
The mother tongue should be the medium of instruction, and where not possible, the regional language could be used. English could stay as an optional language.

A programme of social work should be provided for intending graduates, on a compulsory basis.

Foreign scholarships could be given to students for special training, and that which was not available in India.

He reminded the students of the University that a great task of reconstruction was in front of them.

### 6.4 Overall Contribution

The researcher thought it necessary to mention that, after Syama Prasad became the Vice Chancellor, he brought about certain welcome changes in the University, keeping in mind the importance of nationalism.

In the University convocation address, he for the very first time, appeared in the national dress, as a Vice Chancellor. He instilled in the minds of students, that besides academics, there were other things to be pursued by them so as to bring about healthy life and unity.

He initiated the new University Flag, which was dark blue in colour with the words, ‘Advancement of Learning’ written in white letters, along with a lotus and the Bengali word ‘Shree’ printed on it.

It is noteworthy to mention that, after his return from England with his degree in Law, he joined the High Court. But he was more comfortable in doing social works outside the court. For example, a student who was suspended from the Presidency College for being a part of the Satyagraha Movement, received great help from Syama Prasad in getting admission in some other college. Again, he went on to help another student of City College, who was suspended because he organized the Saraswati Puja at the College Hostel. Ultimately, this student could sit for the examinations with Syama Prasad’s intervention.
Syama Prasad also arranged for the holding of examinations in the jail, for the inmates, which was applauded by all.

Another very outstanding contribution of Syama Prasad was the introduction of Providend Fund for the ministerial staff of the University. He was the President of the Calcutta University Employees’ Union. So, on behalf of the University staff, he forwarded a scheme to the syndicate.

Some of them were as follows:-

(a) Syama Prasad wanted one uniform set of Providend Fund rules for University Teachers as well as the Ministerial staff of the different departments of the University.

(b) Against the above, he proposed that the entire fund should be under one Board of Management, in which two seats will be reserved for the Union’s representatives.

(c) Syama Prasad chalked out the various rates on which the Providend Fund will be calculated for pension holders as well.

It is widely known that Sir Asutosh and Dr. Dinesh Sen took great pain in preserving the folk literature and folk culture, and its resources, therein. But, immediately after the demise of Asutosh, this culture suffered a setback. His son, without hesitation took the reigns and became the chairman of the ‘Bengali Ballads Committee’

One of the greatest contributions of Syama Prasad was that of bringing Rabindranath Tagore to the Calcutta University as a special University professor. This was one of the brightest feather in the history of Calcutta University. The post graduate students of this University was fortunate enough to get into close interaction with our great poet.

Another initiative of Syama Prasad was the giving of an ‘academic reception’, from the University. Tagore became the ‘Kamala Lecturer’ for the year 1930. Then, at
the behest of Syama Prasad again, Tagore gave his historic convocation speech in Bengali language.

Tagore requested him to allow the students of Shantiniketan, to give their examinations under the Calcutta University. Syama Prasad very gladly made appropriate arrangements for the above. Infact, in 1932, during the tenureship of Sir Hasaan Suhrawardy as Vice Chancellor, he set up a committee under the chairmanship of the famed writer Rajsekhar Bose, whose main job was the reconstruction of Bengali spellings. This committee had, as their member, the great poet Tagore and novelist Sarat Chandra Chattopadhayay. Besides all this, he took the work of publishing various books from the University Press. Infact, he himself wrote a few books in the names of ‘Panchasher Mannanter’, ‘Dinpanji’, etc.

6.5 Conclusion

Syama Prasad felt that University education was a natural continuation of a varied type of secondary education, which provides for higher and advanced work. He wanted the Calcutta University to play its part with courage, wisdom and foresight, which will allow the nation to sustain itself in the days of trial and of triumph, and thereby lead India towards the fulfillment of her destiny.

He sacrificed most of his life in working for the upliftment of the Calcutta University, thereby paying the ultimate respect and love to his father. As a result, he dwelled into the various activities of the University, so that it could rebuild India. He wished that the alumni of this University should be trained in a worthy manner, saturated with the lessons of Indian history and culture, inspired with skill and knowledge, and thereby apply themselves devotedly to the service of the nation.

He also believed, as is evident from the discussion in this chapter, that education must be multifaceted and institutions of various types must emerge, so as to train people in manifold directions suited to the economic and industrial progress of the country. He very rightfully made education life-oriented. Infact, he wished that the very aim and outlook of Indian Universities should be changed in many respects in the light of our changing conditions in the society. The University’s main policy should be that of progressive expansion. It could also be the mouthpiece of national
hopes and ambitions; it might be a medium for conserving and advancing the knowledge and thereby raise the standard of intellectual life. To achieve all these, Syama Prasad felt that the support of the State and the public was very much needed.

It is noticed that, while he looked into the running of the educational institutions, especially the University, he simultaneously ventured into various opportunities for absorbing the educated youths.

Again, while bringing Bengali language into the limelight, he brought back real prestige to the Calcutta University and Bengal as a whole.

Syama Prasad envisioned that the Indian Universities will constantly move towards a higher and nobler civilization, and thereby build a new India. He also felt that each University should cater to the needs of the area it specially serves.

Typical of the time, he threw light on the role of University and college unions. He urged the students of the University to understand both sides, in order to make the University and college unions a healthy training ground for a better citizenship.

The researcher feels that through all his activities and contribution, he actually wanted the University, within its limited sphere, to reorganize their courses of study, so as to meet the manifold requirements of the people and the country at large. Again, regarding industrialization, he wanted that the Government, the University and the industries to work together for early attainment of economic freedom.

Dr. was one of the pioneers who stressed the need for autonomy of the University. This very idea went on to prove that, without this, all his efforts towards the betterment of the University, will be in vain. It is thus that the University will carry its banner of progress and freedom into the very heart of India.

To conclude, Syama Prasad prophesized that the educated youths and adults, should keep in mind a fact—that is, they exist not for their own sake, but for adding their individual contribution to the advancement of national prosperity.
References


Web References

- www.shyamaprasad.org/about.htm. 16.3.2015

- www.qura.com/History/what_is_the_role_of_shyama_Prasad_Mukherjee_in_Indian_s_freedom_and_politics_thereafter retrieved 16.3.2015

“My ambition had its fulfillment in Syama Prasad in an abundant measure when I lived to see him grow to an immense stature, towering head and shoulders above his fellow beings, including myself.”

-Dr. H.C. Mookherjee (Syama Prasad’s teacher in school)