CHAPTER VII

PRESENT RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY
7.0 Introduction

The study deals with an educational system that prevailed at least 68 years back. The researcher, while mapping the educational activities of Syama Prasad, realises, how he envisioned a plan, which actually runs strong till date. His farsightedness and educational philosophy gave rise to a system, which was so overdue in a country like India. All his contemporaries had various schemes and plans to execute, but could not do it satisfactorily because of the pressure of the colonial rulers.

Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee was undoubtedly an outstanding figure in the emergence of a national system of education in India. He can be acclaimed as one of those leaders who triggered the reorientation of a colonial system to a nationalistic system of education. He brought about several fundamental changes for which, we stand on a firm footing today. First of all, Syama Prasad very rightfully felt the need of scientific and technological study and its bonding with the industrial sector of the country. He went on to inaugurate quite a few scientific educational organisations, which has its influence felt, still today. Most of the science departments of the University owe its existence to Dr. Syama Prasad. One of the greatest step he took was the introduction of Bengali as a language in the core education system, without which mass education would not have been possible. He brought about several reformations in the University regarding examination as well as teaching. Last, but not the least, he introduced the Educational Research Department, along with the initiation of Bengali language to be used in the research studies.

7.1 Present day relevance

Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee believed that education was the first step towards nationalism. As we stand today, wherein the rate of literacy is steadily going up, the researcher thought it erstwhile to remember, that it was Syama Prasad who advocated the concept of free and compulsory education in order to facilitate mass education. Education in pre-independence India, was mainly meant for the elitist
class; common citizens and middle class people did not have equal access to education, especially to higher education.

Besides, India was ruled by a foreign Government, where English was the commonly used medium of instruction, right from the lower to the highest stage. While studying the relevance in the present day, it should be noted that it was the one and only Syama Prasad, who introduced Bengali and other regional languages, in the educational system, whether it be medium of instruction or the examination. He felt that without this provision, people would have continued to have an aversion to taking up higher studies.

When Syama Prasad Mookerjee became the Vice-Chancellor, he initiated the practice of carrying on a lot of educational and scientific research work, through the medium of Bengali. In fact in 1935, he brought about a radical change in secondary education, by the revised Matriculation Regulations, where instruction was to be imparted through the medium of mother tongue – and that is followed till date. Again, a large number of new subjects were introduced by him. He, in fact, was the very first person to print suitable text books written in Bengali. Today, we realize that this inception of the vernacular in every level of education, did bring about a re-orientation that was of great importance then, and is still today.

Syama Prasad envisaged a reform which had a far reaching importance, and for which, we are grateful to him. It was the inclusion of science subjects at the Intermediate standard. If it was not for him, it would have taken more time for science to get introduced in our educational system. In addition to this, he stressed that practical classes be taken apart from theoretical ones. In the present day, we know, how much this is needed for a complete knowledge.

Similarly, it is noticed that a lot of research work is being done through the medium of Bengali language in the present. It was the one and only Syama Prasad who initiated this practice, when he became the Vice-Chancellor. Infact the Calcutta University for the very first time, had awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy to a successful candidate, who had written his thesis in Bengali.
language. This practice facilitates scholars of today, to do research work and enhance and uplift the national education and culture to the present prestige of our country.

Another very important thing which we find very relevant is the Student Exchange Programme. Syama Prasad Mookerjee made arrangements for students and teachers to go to foreign seats of learning in various countries in Europe, USA, South America and Far East. In fact, these scholars were advised to take up subjects relating to technical and industrial training as well. Alongside, distinguished scholars of the University were duly invited to deliver special courses here, so as to benefit our students. This very process is widely practised by the Universities, without which knowledge dissemination is impossible.

In regard to the field of Medicine and Engineering, Syama Prasad took the task of revising the total syllabus and raise its standard and extend their scope and utility.

Dr. Mookerjee never overlooked the changing needs of the country. He went on to rouse public opinion and to focus the attention of all, on the supreme necessity of finding new occupation and careers. Like today, he was also of the opinion that it was the paramount duty of the state to provide employment in various fields and create opportunities to the fullest. As is the thought today, Syama Prasad felt that education should be fully integrated with all social requirements. He wanted University education to be enjoyed by all and sundry and not limited to a small group of the elite class.

Regarding scientific studies, Syama Prasad Mookerjee introduced the various Applied Science Departments in the Calcutta University. Because of him, the departments of Zoology, Botany, Anthropology, Experimental Psychology and Physiology were brought together in a single campus, in order to facilitate all students and teachers.

Another very important factor in the education system is the availability of a proper University library. Even now, it is impossible to carry on higher studies without it.
During his time, the University library did not have sufficient accommodation, but the student strength was increasing at a very fast pace. Syama Prasad took the task of expanding the Library by building the fourth storey of the Asutosh Building, where the University General Library and the Lending library is located. Today, the students are immensely benefitted by it.

After years of colonial rule and its typical education system, Syama Prasad Mookerjee felt the need to formulate special courses for special institutions. In today’s world, it is so relevant, to the extent that nowadays, we cannot think of education which is detached from life and needs. Today’s career building can track its source in the bygone days, when Syama Prasad thought of vocational and practical training to be undertaken by the University and colleges.

Along with the above, Syama Prasad very rightfully stressed on the need of complete autonomy, regarding running of the University. Autonomy is still enjoyed by all Universities, without which the Universities could not have spread education appropriately. It may be noted herewith, that, St. Xavier’s College and Ramkrishna Mission Sikshanamandira have acquired autonomy; the very concept that was brewed by Syama Prasad so many years ago.

It may be rightfully said that he converted the University into a centre of popular education. It was made open to all and sundry, as he fought for mass education as well as a nationalistic education. So, he made sure that curriculum of all subjects were revised, so as to walk towards total development. As is the practice now, he advocated English to be used in higher learning, especially Western Scientific studies.

Syama Prasad Mookerjee was highly concerned with the health and welfare of the students of the University, besides intellectual activities. He set up the Students’ Welfare Department, which worked towards the well – being of students as well as take preventive measures.
Syama Prasad was very fond of games and sports. So, he acquired a playground for the University at the Presidency ground. Today, we find that the University has a Sports Department and a team of its own, complete with all facilities. This would not have been possible, if it was not for our very sports loving Vice-Chancellor.

One of the highly acclaimed contribution of Syama Prasad Mookerjee was the initiation of the University Foundation Day. It was during his tenure as Vice-Chancellor, that this day was celebrated with great pomp and show in January. Behind this, he was of the opinion that the youth should be given the chance to live, an opportunity to enjoy life. The researcher feels that this very attitude, if followed by all of us, even today, would be an upliftment of the morale of today’s student population.

The researcher, while treading into the various educational endeavour of Syama Prasad related to the development of Science education as a whole, found that he partially reorganised the science laboratories. The Department of Anthropology was transferred to the Ballygunge Campus. Considering the Applied Sciences, a new building was constructed for Applied Chemistry. Similarly, the seats were increased for Applied Physics. Syama Prasad wanted the Science College to widen its activities so that it could initiate new courses for varied industrial careers. The benefits of all the above are being reaped by us at present as well as for the days to come. In fact, Applied Physics opened the scope for Communication Engineering, which at present is, Information Engineering. We owe a great deal to our great educationist Syama Prasad, for the establishment of various new streams like the above, and thereby bring about new avenues of employment, which was so needed in independent India.

Dr. Mookerjee envisaged the education of women and adults. Today, we are still trying to take this aspect further and striving hard to educate adults. The critical importance of these two fields of education have been in no way diminished. He was the one who first suggested the formation of a Board of Secondary Education. The researcher finds it so relevant in the present day context.
Syama Prasad envisaged primary education, secondary education and University education to be the backbone of our nationalistic education. He showed the path of progress and, a democratic control in the sphere of education. Thorough curricular revision and renewal of primary and secondary education was attempted by him. The academic preparation should be appropriate at every stage so that they can confidently frame the emerging challenges of the next stage. In fact, this is a permanent academic challenge and Syama Prasad was one of the first Indians to realize this.

Also, the University today awards many scholarships and fellowships to students belonging to the socio-economically disadvantaged groups. Syama Prasad was the pioneer in this sort of thought and action.

Syama Prasad introduced Teacher’s Training Department. Even today, the significance of such a department is highly appreciated. An example may be cited in relation to this. In 1932, the Bengal Retrenchment Committee was formed and which subsequently recommended the abolition of the two training colleges, that of David Hare Training College and Dacca Training College, due to financial crisis. Herein, Syama Prasad took up the cause, wherein he pressed the Government, for the retention of both the above colleges as well as establishment of new ones. Without this, it would not have been possible to run the educational institutions successfully. As was reported in the ‘The Telegraph’ dated 18th February, 2015, it is mandatory that a student should undergo the Teacher’s Training course, before the candidate can sit for Teachers’ Eligibility Test. Herein comes the utility of Teachers Training. He said that without proper training of the teachers, the quality of education might be affected. Also, RTE Act, 2009, proacted from this perspective.

On the other side, when he set up the Asutosh Museum of Indian Arts as an adjunct to the Department of Ancient Indian History and Culture, many students got interested in this subject and took the advantage of the facilities therein. Now, hundreds of students flock to this department. In fact, Syama Prasad took the
tedious responsibility of making the walls covered by fresco paintings, so as to facilitate the post-graduate students.

Another very significant thing he did was the establishment of the Employment Exchange. The idea behind this goes back to the days of Syama Prasad when he felt that jobs were being reserved for Muslims, by the Provincial Government. Merit was not taken into consideration. So, to ensure equality of job opportunity, he set up Employment Exchange for University students and ex-students. The very idea of organising a link between the employer and employment seeker was carried forward, well into the post-independent period.

The researcher, goes on to study as to how an University can contribute towards national advancement, and which was the watchword of the time. Syama Prasad went on to propose that new vocations, avenues and employment will be open to Indian youths, especially in the field of Navy, Army, Trade, Commerce and Industry. Keeping in mind the making of an independent India, he, for the first time stressed on technical knowledge of various kinds, for example, military training under the University Cadet Corps, conducted by the University. As we stand today, the very stone of India’s economic and industrial development was set rolling by Syama Prasad.

Again, the problems of health, sanitation, hygiene and diet were given high importance, and so this area was investigated at the behest of Syama Prasad, who felt that it was high time that India realized the significance of a developing economy. But unfortunately, even today we are still grappling to bring about a congenial condition regarding the above few factors.

Today’s India is aware that agriculture contributes largely to the economy. Years back, Syama Prasad felt the same. He therefore, brought the study of Agriculture under the banner of the University. He wanted the students to explore science and its technology with regard to agriculture, so as to increase the productive power of land; at present we are still trying to boost our production for sustainance of so many. Today, there exists Agricultural Colleges and Universities as well. Closely
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linked with this are the countrywide Cottage Industries, which Syama Prasad did not forget to take interest in.

Syama Prasad was way ahead of his time. He proposed that Economics and Banking, India’s position in relation to foreign trade and competition, needed to be investigated and fulfilled for an economically free India.

Considering the situation at the time, he stood for the fact that education should be free from the undercurrents of political strife. Unfortunately, we still have not come out of it. Of late, in Bengal, we saw how the students at the school level suffered regarding the introduction of English, as it was the demand of the day.

It is really admirable, that Syama Prasad, at the very right time, felt that Indians were not adequately trained to defend themselves from foreign invasions. He felt that 90% of Indians were deep into illiteracy and ignorance. There were many other weaknesses of which Indians felt bitter about. He very rightfully said that an autonomous India was unthinkable without a National Army and a National Navy controlled and manned by Indians themselves.

Syama Prasad pleaded that English should remain a compulsory second language and should be taught to all. Provision should also be made for the study of other important languages, both eastern and western. At present, our Universities, colleges, schools still adhere to these specifications.

Another very significant relevance of Syama Prasad’s contribution is towards the industrial sector. He observed that industrial development cannot be conditioned only by research; it is all the more dependent on finance. He was aptly called to Nehru’s cabinet with the portfolio of Industries and Supplies. During that time, he was the first Vice-President of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research under which forty laboratories were being set up. According to Prof. R.A.Mashelkar, Director General and secretary, Department of CSIR, Government of India – “the strong foundation laid as a result of the pioneering efforts of Dr. Mookerjee has enabled the CSIR to achieve its current status of a premier level
National Research and Development Organisation in India. In fact, NPL (National Physical Laboratory) was founded under his behest. Due to his tireless effort, the Central Glass and Ceramic Research Institute was established. He worked very closely with Dr. Meghnad Saha. Today’s Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics was inaugurated by Dr. Mookerjee.

In the present day context it may be said that Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee showed the path on which our University still treads. He has given the University a new dimension. As globalisation has ensued, we cannot but have accepted English as a major medium of education, of course, parallel with Bengali and other Indian vernaculars. The ideas and reforms infused by him pertaining to the University holds a permanent place.

Coming to Bengal in particular, ‘Syama Prasad College’, founded by Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee, was established immediately after the end of World War II in 1945 at Kolkata. It was then named as Asutosh College of Commerce (evening section). This college has its genesis in Asutosh College and has primarily been designed to meet the growing demand for higher education in Commerce. This Evening Section was delinked from Asutosh College and acquired the status of a full-fledged independent college in 1958 with a separate Principal and separate management (i.e. Governing Body) under instruction from University Grants Commission and with the approval and affiliation of University of Calcutta. After the immature demise of Dr. Mookerjee, Calcutta University resolved to perpetuate the memory of Dr. Mookerjee by renaming the college founded by him as ‘Syama Prasad College’ in 1962. The college is situated at 92, Syama Prasad Road, Kolkata.

To conclude, few things may be mentioned, that has been done to pay homage to this great leader of India. On 27th August, 1998, the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation named a bridge after Mookerjee.
On 22nd April, 2010, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi’s newly constructed Rs. 650 crore building has been named ‘Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee Civic Centre’. It was inaugurated by the then Home Minister P.Chidambaram.

In 2001, CSIR, the main research funding institute of the Government of India, formed a new fellowship named after him. The Syama Prasad Mookerjee Fellowship is the most prestigious one given in India for doing a Ph.D. Only the top 20% of students who clear the Junior Research Fellowship (JRF CSIR/UGC) are eligible to sit for this examination.

The building, which will cater to an estimated 20,000 visitors per day, will also house different wings and offices of the MCD. Delhi also has a major road named after Mookerjee, as does Kolkata. The MCD also built the Syama Prasad Swimming Pool Complex which hosted aquatic events during the 2010 Commonwealth Games held at New Delhi.

A BEST bus stop near the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya and Regal Cinema in Mumbai is named Syama Prasad Mukherjee Chowk in his honour.

On 15 January 2012, Mathikere flyover under Bangalore City Limits was inaugurated and named the Dr Syama Prasad Mukherjee Flyover.

In 2014, a multipurpose indoor stadium built on the Goa University campus in Goa was named after Mookerjee.

In 2015, the Government of India launched Syama Prasad Mookerjee Rurban Mission to drive economic, social and infrastructure development in rural areas and create 300 rurban areas to stem increasing migration to urban areas. This scheme was operationalized in February 2016.

Recently, a discussion on the 60th martyrdom of Syama Prasad was organised by Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee Research Foundation, which is situated at 11, Asoka Road, New Delhi. The topic of discussion was ‘Threats to India’s National Identity and Security’, and persons like Mr. Jashwant Singh graced the occasion.
Again, an exhibition was inaugurated along with a special lecture on Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee was organised by Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMNL) under the Ministry of Culture in collaboration with Syama Prasad Mookerjee Foundation.

7.2 Conclusion

In the present day context, the contributions of Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee is still very much significant. The several memorial institution, colleges, roads and cultural centres, all over India reminds us of the dynamic thoughts of Syama Prasad Mookerjee, which are still very relevant and occupies an important place in the society at large. If it was not for his far – sighted philosophy and actions, India, and Bengal in particular would not have had such an esteemed University, which goes on to provide higher education to its citizens.

Finally it may be said that a lot of effort is being given to remember our great leader, but there is still lot more to be done.
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“The Dynamic forcefulness of his personality made lasting impression on all those who came into contact with him.”

- Dr. Sarvpalli Radhakrishnan