

PRESIDENCY UNIVERSITY

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The 'Hindoo College', established in 1817, was transformed into the 'Presidency College of Bengal' in 1855. The Hindoo College was the earliest institution of higher learning in the modern sense in Asia. The Presidency College introduced western education in the historical sense of the term and was originally a non-government college meant for the sons of the Hindu community alone. But the Centenary Volume (1955) notes: 'The most striking feature of the Hindu College was its determined effort to impart secular education.' In 1855 when the Hindoo College was renamed Presidency College, it became a government institution. The college now represented non-denominational secularism and admitted young men from all communities. However, it was only in 1944 that girls were permitted to join the college. Since then, the college has been a co-educational institution.

The Hindoo-Presidency College, which aimed from the beginning at a liberal, scientific and secular education, stood on the side of the 'Anglicists' in the famous Anglicist-Orientalist debate. This meant that the college stood for modern, western education in the English medium. This, however, would not entail a neglect of Indian themes and subjects. This was borne out by the contribution of the students of the college to Bengali language and literature. The subjects taught at the outset were English, Bengali, Sanskrit, History, Geography, Chronology, Astronomy, Mathematics, Chemistry and some other science subjects. In addition, Law, Commerce and Engineering were taught for some time, but teaching of these was discontinued later. Consequently, the college emerged as the most celebrated institution in India to impart a humanistic and scientific education.

The pioneering discoveries of Jagadish Chandra Bose and Praphulla Chandra Ray in Physics / Plant Physiology and Chemistry respectively were made in the laboratories of the college. Teaching of both liberal arts and empirical sciences acquired true excellence in the nineteenth century and the tradition continued even after independence. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Anandaram Barooah, students of the college, enriched Bengali and Assamese literature. S.N.Bose, M.N.Saha, P.C.Mahalanobish, Amal Kumar Raychaudhuri, Shyamal Sengupta, Ashoke Sen made world-class contribution in the field of basic science. Amartya Sen and Sukhamoy Chakraborty made contributions to economic theory in the decades after independence. These names are merely illustrative, for the alumni of the college have distinguished themselves both nationally and internationally in various fields. The college, amongst whose alumni were a President of India (Dr. Rajendra Prasad), a Prime Minister of Pakistan (Muhammad Ali of Bogra) and a President of Bangladesh (Abu Sayeed Chowdhury), has a challenging past to live up to.