

A Calcutta Diary

Miss University, 1957

NEWS of the dispute over the age of Miss Gladys Zender—Miss Universe 1957—came at about the same time as the different constituencies were electing a senate for the hundred years old Calcutta University. The elections are over, and there is no doubt at all that the University is 100 years old—at least. There is something musty about the whole business, and the campaigning that preceded the counting of votes reminded one oftener of municipal elections. There was nothing in the least bit academic about the whole proceedings, and not a few of the participants were as far removed from University affairs as the Sudra used to be from the temples in the south. Against this background, Dr. Roy's recent denunciation of the entry of "politics" in the sacred field of education sounded rather empty except when it seemed full of a wholly unintended meaning. In the latter acceptance Dr. Roy was taken to mean that men with suasions different from his own or the Congress' were seeking to disturb the University's permanent settlement. A common error is to think that this system of tenure obtained only on land.

As for politics, they are no strangers in the University situated above the cloth shops and stationery stores opposite College Square which has not only been the unofficial retiring room for generations of students but also the venue of some of the best political speeches ever heard this side of Suez. Politics, let us face it, have never been absent from the thoughts of the thinking Bengali for a long long time, whatever the institution on hand, and Dr Roy's condemnation of politics in education was itself a political statement. Indeed, as one thinks of what has gone on one is inclined to welcome politics in university education even as one is ready to prefer open professionalism in Calcutta football to the sort of demi-mondaine hypocrisy of today.

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Such pleasure as one has in repeating an unpleasant thesis proven right is entirely morbid, I have no pleasure at all in saying again that our poorest record is in the self-governing institutions and that Calcutta University is as good,

meaning as bad, an instance of our national failure in this department as any. In spite of producing some of the greatest Indians in the past hundred years—though most of them before self-government came—the fact remains that in its management Calcutta University was singularly unfortunate even when it could take some pride in its academic attainments. The man responsible for making the university one of the best in the country in many ways cannot be wholly absolved of the responsibility for not a few of the evils which reign today without the relieving sight of countervailing virtues.

The fact is that as soon as you admitted the principle of non-academic control of this seat of learning you admitted a series of forces the nature of which began to manifest itself in its full ugliness only with the passage of time. The University became one more "position of strength" to capture from which to fight the battle of your choosing. The enemy could be the British, in which event you proceeded to produce graduates by the thousand in complete disregard of academic standards for the more frustration you had, the more your recruits for non-cooperation or civil disobedience or what had you. Sometimes the battle was communal. Never never was it academic.

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Politics, as I was saying, came early. And it was then but inevitable that the University should go through the same tortuous processes as politics did. The Muslim League tried its worst to weaken the vested interests in the University; the strength of the attack astonished even the attacker. As the Congress Party took over the administration after independence, it too sought to extend its control over the University; and Dr Roy, whose association with the University, especially its finances, was already close can well claim that his writ runs in the University too as long as it is not too much in conflict with the interests which had entrenched themselves earlier. It would have been surprising if the growing strength of the Left had not also come into the arena. This last element is what Dr Roy calls "politics."

In the outgoing senate the Left

was represented in reasonable strength; the earlier vested interests remain where it was their birthright (in more senses than one) to remain, but the Congress had been caught napping. Not so this time. The Left, calling itself Education Reforms Association—for the pretence must be maintained that there is no politics—has this time been routed good and proper, and now we have a fusion of what may be called the vested interests and the investing interests. The University's financial dependence on the Government makes a mockery of academic independence, for our governments have not yet learnt to give without extracting a rake-off in terms of control.

Better or worse? Perhaps neither. Or, perhaps both. Leftist criticism, however loud, had not succeeded in securing the publication of the Sir B. L. Mitter report which is believed to have exposed the original vested interests in some detail. Now we will hear the criticism no more. The loss may be only of our cars. The massive Mookerjees remain, and Dr Roy co-exists with them. Did I hear somebody speak of education? The subject, sir, is not on the agenda. Order, order.

—Flibbertigibbet

July 23.

Punjab National Bank

THE working of the Punjab National Bank Ltd., for the half year ended 30th June, 1957 shows all round progress. Deposits as on 30th June, 1957 exceed Rs 117 crores showing an increase of Rs 11 crores. The total working funds of the bank exceeds Rs 152 crores as against Rs 141 crores as on 31st December, 1956.

Subject to audit, the net profits for the half year, after providing for contingencies, amount to *lis* 62.92 lakhs including Rs 6.20 lakhs brought forward from previous year's account as against Rs 49.23 lakhs (which included Rs 2.35 lakhs brought forward) for the corresponding half year in 1956.

The Directors have decided to declare an ad-interim dividend of Rs 2.50 per share, free of income tax, as against Rs 2.00 for the corresponding period last year,

