

Right to Information Act: Description

SENATE OF SERAMPORE COLLEGE (UNIVERSITY) AT NINETY: ISSUES AND CONCERNS

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Introductory Remarks

Very few are aware that Serampore College as the first University in this sub-continent is completing one hundred and ninety years of its existence. Not many have heard of the Royal Danish Charter of 1827 which was granted to Serampore College with the power to grant degrees, diplomas and certificate in any branch of knowledge decades earlier than the establishment of universities in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. Of late, there is a tendency to ignore that Serampore College still exists, serving the people of West Bengal in providing collegiate education to its children in the Faculties of Arts, Science and Commerce through affiliation with the University of Calcutta, and higher theological education to the ministers of the churches through its Faculty of Theology with affiliated colleges in India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. It is high time that we recollect our past, strengthen our present and plan for the future.

Any one, who is acquainted with Serampore system, is not unaware of the issues being raised, and questions asked, every now and then, concerning the status of Serampore College (University) and its Senate. The present article is an attempt to answer a few of the questions raised, and clarifies some issues. These questions and issues are not new, but have been raised and discussed at the time the Bill, associated with the power of Serampore College to grant degrees, was introduced in the Bengal Legislative Council in 1918. They are relevant even now since they are being asked, more often than in the past, by people who belong to the system, as well those who do not.

Ever since I joined Senate as its Registrar, I have been involved in the process of efforts that have been undertaken for the recognition of Serampore College by University Grant Commission as it did in the past, and enlisting it in the Universities Handbook, published by the Association of Indian Universities. Serampore has been recognized among the universities in India in the past, but has lost its place in the recent past, even in history of university education in India. Writing historical note on the Universities in India in the Hand-book of the Universities for the year 1953-54, Prof. Samuel Mathai, then Secretary of Inter-university Board of India (1948-53), acknowledged the contribution of Serampore and Hindu Colleges, terming Serampore College as the first Western University in India: 'The Hindu College had already been founded in Calcutta in 1817 for the purpose of imparting western knowledge through the medium of English and this had been followed in 1818 by the establishment of a college in Serampore by Christian Missionaries for the instruction of youth in Eastern Literature and European Science. In 1827, this institution obtained a Royal Charter from the king of Denmark to whom Serampore belonged and it may thus claim to be first western University in India'². It is interesting to note that the introduction of the 25th edition of the Universities Handbook in 1992 comments: 'Small pockets of Western culture began to appear on the sub-continent. One such group, the Danes, actually founded what may be called the first European University at Serampore near Calcutta in 1818. It taught only Theology and hardly had any influence on higher education'³. One can easily recognize the erroneous assessment of the contribution of Serampore by the writer of the introduction in this volume, to the foundational and higher education in India, particularly in Bengal, contradicting Prof. Mathai. One may, however, note with some satisfaction, that in a special issue of University News⁴, published by the Association of Indian University on the occasion of post centenary golden jubilee celebration of University of Calcutta in 2007, Prof. Basudev Chattopadhyay⁵ noted that Serampore College was one of the first to be affiliated to the University of Calcutta and the oldest of the affiliated colleges. It also noted that "this is the only affiliated College under the jurisdiction of the University of Calcutta which grants a degree- B.D degree"⁶. One may quite wonder, if it had no influence on higher education, and is not a University, how it could have been the first affiliate of a newly established university in 1857 and continues to grant a degree B.D till now!!!

Needless to say that somewhere in the past, the name of Serampore College, not only as the first University but also the only Theological University in India, was deleted from the records and history of education in India. This, in turn, also removed the name of Serampore College (University) from the list of universities in the International handbook of Universities, published by the International

Association of Universities in cooperation with the Centre on Higher Education of the UNESCO (IAU/UNESCO). It is to point out that the UNESCO, in its own document, issued from Paris in 1952, as a matter of fact, noted that 'Serampore College (near Calcutta), founded in 1818 by European missionaries received in 1827 a Royal Charter from King Frederick VI of Denmark (to whom Serampore then belonged) and this was confirmed by the British Government in 1845. But the Charter was not utilized till 1915 when degrees in divinity were granted for the first time. The position now is that in the Faculties of Arts and Science Serampore College is affiliated to Calcutta University, but in the Faculty of Theology the College functions as an **independent University**.'⁷ Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi, Honourable Minister of Human Resource Development and Science and Technology, noted the same in his paper presented at the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education in Twentieth Century, held in Paris in 1998. He said that 'the first institution to be given the status of a university was Serampore College, near Calcutta, in 1829'.⁸ It is unfortunate that the same institutions are now shy of recognizing Serampore. It is equally unfortunate that we, in Serampore, did not, for long, take note of this, or ignored exclusions. This was the beginning of difficulties, and a few problems, for Serampore graduates. One was the complexity of its students to get admission in foreign universities, second was the denial of visa to graduates in theology by foreign governments. Some face the denial of job opportunities in armed forces and elsewhere. Some of Indian universities denied admissions to Serampore graduate in theology for higher education. In the context of this, the old issues were again brought into focus along with the new. We have to address them for the sake of theological education in this sub-continent.

In the process of an attempt to re-enlist Serampore among the fraternity of Indian universities, a delegation of representatives of Serampore system (Council, Senate, BTESSC and friends) met the officials and the minister of the State Government, Minister of Human Resource and Development at the Centre, and also the Chairman, University Grant Commission. It may surprise many to know that the official and ministers did expressed their astonishment at the fact that a college is a University even though it does not have a word 'university' suffixed or prefixed with its name. One official, in ignorance, told us that we can not technically be called 'University' or use the word with the College in spite of the fact that many colleges/institutions are now deemed as universities in our country.

Anticipating this confusion, the Executive of the Senate in 1942 approved its Regulations for the Faculty of Theology with the addition of the following in its Historical Note which has become an integral part of all the subsequent Regulations:

Hitherto the term 'Serampore College' has been used in two different senses. It sometimes been used to mean the Theological Department of the College situated at Serampore, of which the Arts and Science departments are affiliated to Calcutta University. At other times the term has signified Serampore College in its capacity as a University incorporated by Royal Charter, with affiliated colleges and external students and with power to grant degrees. Considerations of convenience necessitate that the term should continue to be used in the first two senses. Legal considerations require that it should continue to be used in the second sense. To avoid ambiguity, throughout these Revised Regulations when the term 'Serampore College' is used in the second sense the word 'University' is added in the brackets.⁹

Bengal Act is now ninety years old, so also the Senate. We often forget that Bengal Act is not an Act establishing a new University, but is an Act to recognize Serampore College as a valid University, empowered to grant degrees in any branch or branches of knowledge, though it confines this power, for time being only, in the faculty of theology¹⁰. It is enacted to enlarged the Council, making it more ecumenical, introduce two new legal bodies- Faculty to look after the internal management of Serampore College under delegated powers of the Council, and the Senate, an inter-denominational body to conduct the academic administration of the university for the academic programmes of the College.

It is necessary that the issues, if raised, are to be discussed and not ignored, and the facts are placed before the people, the government and the UGC.

Serampore College (University): Charter and the Act

There is not an iota of doubt with regard to the status of Serampore College as a University. The Charter, granted by His Royal Danish Majesty in 1827, and the Serampore College Act-1918 of the Bengal Legislative Council are the legal documents in its support. They are printed, as modified from time to time, latest one being in 1997.¹¹ For the clarification of some issues, we can refer to the proceedings on the Serampore College Bill in the Bengal Legislative Council.

Serampore College Bill, 1918 was introduced in the Bengal Legislative Assembly under item no. 11, on January 22, 1918¹², and it was passed, as an Act on March 28, 1918. It received the assent of the Governor-General and was gazetted on May 1, 1918.

It was clearly stated that the bill was introduced 'to supplement, and in certain matters to supersede, the Royal Charter of Incorporation and the Statutes and Regulations of the Serampore College'¹³. The same is incorporated in the Act as Article 15¹⁴. Mr. O'Mally, while proposing the bill, clearly mentioned that 'the College was incorporated in 1827 by a Royal Charter by the King of Denmark, which gave it the powers of a University for conferring degrees'¹⁵. It also authorized the College to make and establish the Statutes and Regulations which it did in 1833. In accordance with the terms of the Charter, the Council of the College with a Master or President with at least two, but not more than four, members was constituted. It was also mentioned that one of the members might belong to any denomination other than that of Baptists. It was indeed a spirit of ecumenism clearly manifested here much before the dawn of twentieth century ecumenism, a spirit that was never diminished in the history of the College.

It was also informed that Serampore was transferred to the British by a Treaty of Purchase in 1846 which recognized the Charter and a provision was made for the continuance of right and immunities granted to the College under the general law of India. In 1856, the Council placed College at the disposal of Baptist Missionary Society for use in its educational work, both secular and theological. In 1857, it was affiliated to the newly established University of Calcutta.

Reorganization of the College

In 1900, a movement for the reorganization of the College, on the lines laid down by the original founders, was set in. It was contemplated that facilities for higher theological studies, similar to that accorded in the west, in conjunction with a liberal course of general education in literature, philosophy and science, should be provided at the College. The need was to utilize the Charter for granting theological degrees to the students of all churches, removing denominational limitations from it. Dr. Howells expressed the same views, as he remarked, 'all we seek now is to broaden our foundations so as to secure closer cooperation with other Christian bodies besides the Baptists'¹⁶.

It is for this purpose, the Council of Serampore College decided to move the Government for legislation to enlarge its membership so as to allow inter-denominational co-operation in the governance of the College. The Bill, therefore, meant to provide for an alteration in the Charter; the Council of Serampore College was enlarged to a maximum of fifteen members in addition to the Master, while one-third of the members must belong to the Baptist denomination. A Faculty of the College was proposed which shall be responsible to the Council for the internal management of the college.¹⁷ It also created a non-denominational Senate¹⁸ which shall frame the courses of studies and control the examinations.

Issues of Discussion

Naturally, the members were intrigued as to the purpose of such a bill; prospect of another University in the suburban area, need for the revival of the Charter, validity of Treaty that took place in 1846, nomenclature of degrees in theology different than those in Arts and Science, university powers of Serampore (restriction or abolition) etc. These, and others, were the subjects that still draw our interest and attention.

Revival of Charter

It is interesting to note that one of the legislators, Babu Ambica Charan Mazumdar¹⁹, rightly noted that the College did not exercise its power to grant degrees after the granting of Charter in 1827 till the Treaty of Purchase in 1845. A University was established by the Charter in 1858 in Calcutta, and

Serampore College, waiving off the rights under Charter, was duly affiliated to it, enjoying handsome grant from the Government for its maintenance. Reviving and invoking the Charter after three quarters of a century to establish a university does raise a few questions that need to be answered. All this was taken care of in the discussion on the Bill and the Act. It fell on the shoulders of Dr. Howells to inform the House that the financial crisis in India during early period prevented College to exercise the powers.²⁰ Moreover the College was actively engaged in the noble task for providing universal and foundational education to the people before embarking upon the higher university education. Not many appreciate the fact that the founding fathers were more interested in providing basic education to the people than en-cashing upon the power granted by the Charter. When the time did arrive, the College decided to take advantage of the privileges of the Charter, but only to grant degrees in theology. Dr. Howells, on his retirement could note with satisfaction: 'all our ordinary privileges under the Charter and statutes remain under this Act untouched, except that if we begin to grant degrees in any other branch of knowledge or science than theology, we must satisfy the Government that we are properly equipped for the purpose'²¹.

We can take note of the fact that the nothing of the Charter and the Statutes and Regulations of the College were altered/changed/supplemented/added except those specifically mentioned in the Act.

Nature and status of Treaty

We can only appreciate the concern of the Danish King who, in succumbing to the pressure for the sale of the settlement to the British, agreed to do so only after personally attending to the question of preserving the rights of the College. A clause was inserted in the Treaty that the rights and immunities granted to Serampore College by Royal Charter of 1827 shall not be interfered with, but continue in force in the same manner as they had been granted in British India, subject to the general law of British India²².

The Treaty of 1845 is a very definite treaty with a foreign power, solemnly entered into, confirming without a shadow of doubt the University powers already conferred by the Danish Crown on the College. This treaty cannot be treated as mere scraps of paper that can be repudiated. Dr. Howells asserted that the lawyers in India and England had also interpreted to say that 'Serampore college possesses these powers, real University powers, without any reference to any institutions of University rank that might have arisen at a later time'²³. Lord Sinha echoed the same: 'I stated then that at present moment, the Serampore College has the right to confer not only theological degrees, but degrees in Arts and Sciences as well'²⁴.

Serampore College (University) and Calcutta University

There was also an opposition to the special privilege under Article 13, which protects the right of the College to grant degrees in other branches of knowledge than theology, on the grounds that there were more than 41 colleges under Calcutta University which can also claim such a privilege. This privilege was already surrendered by Serampore College in 1858 when it was affiliated to Calcutta University. It was argued, 'if the Treaty was not broken in 1858 it cannot be broken now by leaving matters where they stand'²⁵.

There was a question as to the relationship of Serampore College with Calcutta University, as Shri Mahendra Nath Roy remarked: 'it may be that by granting this power to the Serampore College we may be interfering with the power of the Calcutta University and I do not think that we can grant this power to the Serampore College unless and until the Calcutta University has disaffiliated it first of all'²⁶. The objection was not against granting power to confer degrees in theology, but it was for keeping alive for conferring degrees in other branches while being affiliated to Calcutta University. He also pointed out the provision of Universities Act (perhaps referred to the Act of 1904) which contemplates the grant of degrees only by bodies constituted under that Act. Dr. Howells, however, drew the attention to the fact that the University Commission declared that 'it would be unwise for the Indian Universities to contemplate the conferring of degrees in theology'²⁷. It implied that as there are no university offering degrees in theology, Serampore can use its power to grant such degrees. There was, in fact, no objection if Serampore College was given power to grant degrees in theology, but it should not have any provision for granting degrees in other branches, as this will turn

Serampore College into a University which in turn interfere with the proper jurisdiction of the Calcutta University, and with the proper discharge of the functions of other colleges in the province. This was a legal problem; Treaty has to be respected and should not be abrogated.

University of Calcutta was given an opportunity to discuss the Bill and it did in its faculty of Law and the Senate, and it found nothing wrong in proceeding with the Bill. It was noted by Dr. Howells that 'The Calcutta University has had every opportunity to consider this question and after careful deliberation in the first place by the faculty of law and then by a full Senate the matter was decided and the Calcutta University felt that it would be unnecessary and unfair to interfere in any way with the progress of the Bill through the Council'²⁸. There was a suggestion in the Legislative Council that the Calcutta University should be authorized, not the Government, to take care of the sub-clauses of Article 13 in the spirit of cooperation between two Universities.²⁹ The suggestion did not carry through.

Another interesting discussion needs to be noted. Rai Mahendra Chandra Mohan Mitra Bahadur proposed an addition to the sub-clause to the Article 13 of the Act: 'Provided also that the titles and marks of honour in respect of the degrees intended to be granted by the Council shall be different from those conferred by the University of Calcutta or any other Indian University'³⁰. The rationale was simple; when there are two universities, one granting degrees in secular subjects, and other in theology, the degrees and marks of honours ought to be different. The motion did not find favour in the Council.

We may not be able to find the rationale of different nomenclature of Serampore theological degrees, but there seems to be the one that they are awarded to Christians only. Instead of awarding BA, M.A and Ph.D in Theology as some western universities do, (and as it is often suggested that we should do the same), Serampore has been awarding degrees with different nomenclatures- BTh, BD, MTh and DTh. Its nomenclature clearly demarcates the difference, and sets the limits of theological degrees only to Christians under Serampore System. Moreover, Serampore does not have to approach UGC for the power to grant such degrees under article 22(3) of the UGC Act-1956, as the Commission itself noted. Further, Western Universities can not deny theological studies to the people of other faith as they do not have different nomenclature; whereas Serampore could, and have always been of the opinion that there should be some other nomenclature used for the awards of theological degrees to the people of other faith, though it has not evolved such a degree programme so far. Serampore theological degrees are simply meant of the diversified ministries of the church.

Inherent power in Serampore for granting degree

Dr. George Howells' intervention clarifies all the doubts raised on this issue³¹. He pointed out that there is no meaning in saying that University powers are proposed to be conferred upon Serampore College through this Bill. He asserted, "we possess certain powers and we are not receiving no new powers that we do not at present possess...". As noted above, soon after the foundation of the Colleges and granting of Universities powers, the financial crisis affected great commercial firms, and finances of the College suffered considerably. Considering this situation, the College did not exercise such powers for time being only. The Regulation drawn by the Serampore authorities in the year 1833 too has the same legal validity as that of the Charter, and it states: "The first Council and their successors for ever being authorized by the Charter "to confer such degrees of rank and honor as shall encourage learning" in the same manner as other Colleges and Universities they shall from time to time confer degrees in such branches of Knowledge and Science as may be studied there, in the same manner as the Universities in Denmark, Germany and Great Britain. In doing this the Master and Council shall *ad libitum* call in the aid of any or all the Professors of Serampore College'³².

It may be noted that Lord S.P. Sinha perhaps was the first person who used the term 'Serampore College University' though entire discussion was centered on the College as an institution with powers to grant degrees.³³ Along with Rai Bahadur Mitra, on the other hand, some times he used the term, 'Serampore University'.³⁴

Nomenclature of Serampore degrees

The question of Serampore having power to grant degree was not questioned, but it was pointed out that the proximity of two universities may cause some problem. There should not be any problem if Serampore limits itself in granting degrees only in theology; this was exactly the purpose of the Council of Serampore College in approaching the Government for an Act. Lord Sinha, in clear words, expressed the situation: 'I stated then that at present moment; the Serampore College has the right to confer not only theological degrees, but degrees in Arts and Sciences as well. Supposing the Bill is dropped to day. They can, if they chose, manufacture as many B.A's and M.A's, etc., as they like; there is nothing to prevent them'³⁵. But Serampore preferred to utilize its powers only to grant degrees in theology and for this purpose it used different nomenclatures, Bachelor of Divinity, Licentiate in Theology; Pre Divinity, to which it later added Doctor of Theology, Master of theology etc. It may be the reason, I suppose, that the Act (Article 13) clearly specified that Serampore shall give degrees only in theology. It, therefore, does not need the permission of UGC for its degrees in theology under Article 22 (3) of UGC Act-1956³⁶. It would have been a different case if Serampore was awarding degrees with the nomenclature B.A, M.A, Ph.D in theology after the passage of the Act in 1918; it would then have required taking permission from the UGC for continuing such degrees in 1956 when the UGC Act came into existence. The Council and the Senate, however, did approach the UGC for the continuance of its theological degrees. Information, provided to the Executive Committee of the Senate and to the Senate in 1958, is quite revealing and satisfying:

(a) A letter was read from the Secretary of the College Council forwarding a copy of the resolution of the UGC held in New Delhi on September 26 and 27, 1957.

Item 9: To consider the question of declaring Serampore College as a University under Section 3 of the University Grants Commission Act:

The commission was of the view that as Serampore College is functioning as a University in the Faculty of Divinity under a Bengal Legislation (Act No. IV of 1918) it was not necessary to deem it to be a University under Section 3 of the UGC Act. Any difficulty that may be experienced by the College should be resolved in consultation with the State Govt. The Commission noted that the theological degrees granted by Serampore College had not been included among the degrees to be notified by the commission under Section 22 (3) of the UGC Act and that therefore there should be no bar to the College continuing to award these degrees.³⁷

(b) President drew attention to the following statement issued by the Secretary of the University Grants commission, which had been circulated to the railway Authorities:

"Status of Serampore College: Faculty of Theology.

Serampore College was established under Royal Charter from King Frederick of Denmark in the year 1827. On the transfer of the territory of Serampore to Britain, Serampore College came under British authority and later the original Charter of the College was revalidated by Bengal Act No. IV of 1918. As the Serampore College in the Faculty of Theology is functioning under the Act of the Bengal Legislature, the University Grants Commission has taken the view that it is a legally constituted body of University standing entitled to give its own degree in theology. Students of Serampore College in the Faculty of Theology are, therefore, entitled to all the privileges of students in any of the other universities and colleges in India."³⁸

Significance of Article 13 of the Act

In his discussion on the Bill, Dr. Howells³⁹ pointed out that Article 13 of the Act, with its sub-clauses, recognizes that Colleges, so far as the legal powers are concerned, can proceed to grant degrees even in Arts and Science or any other faculty at any time, but it has, on its own will, voluntarily, in consultation with the Government, limited its powers to grant degrees only in theology. This was done because of the fact of the existence of University of Calcutta as well as the affiliation of the College with it in the faculty of Arts and Science since 1858. In one way, this section validates the affiliation of Arts-Science-Commerce departments of Serampore College with the University of Calcutta and maintains

historic relationship with it. The significance of this concession is not generally recognized and appreciated.

It was a voluntary concession on the part of College. It was made clear to both the parties, the Council of Serampore College and the Government that the College ought not to venture into awarding degrees in other branches of knowledge than theology, unless it is ready for it. The Council was in complete accord with Dr. Howells in asserting, '... we feel that our education ideals of what a University really means, so clear and sound that we have little or no hesitation in making this concession, referred to so far as the granting of Arts degrees is concerned, it would be fatal and ruinous to our own interests to think of exercising this power, unless there is the most abundant justification for it,⁴⁰. At the same time, he did not close the door for the development of the College in future: 'if, at any time, circumstances should lead us in that direction and there should be adequate justification for it in the judgment of those concerned, we retain the right to develop as an independent University, granting our own secular degrees, and I am sure that those have the best interests of education at heart, would in no way oppose the objects we have in view, objects which are perfectly straight forward and perfectly open to the criticism of the Government and the world'⁴¹.

The Article finally passed, and as modified up to 1997, reads as follows:

'If, at any time, the Council shall intend to grant degrees in any branch or branches of knowledge and science other than theology, such degrees shall be confined to students who shall have received regular instruction at the Serampore College; and before the Council proceeds to grant such degrees, it shall satisfy¹[the State Government] as to the adequacy –

- (1) of the establishment and equipment of the College;
- (2) of the academic standard to be maintained; and
- (3) of the financial provision made therefor:

Provided that the said Government, on ceasing to be so satisfied, may withdraw² [its] approval of the granting of such degrees.

(1 The words "Provincial Government" were originally substituted for the words "the Government as defined in section 2(b) of the Indian Universities Act, 1904, in relation to the University of Calcutta" by para. 3 and Sch. IV, to the Government of India (Adaptation of Indian Laws) Order, 1937, and thereafter the word "State" was substituted for the word "Provincial" by paragraph 4 (1) of the Adaptation of Laws Order, 1950.

2 This word was substituted for the word "their" by paragraph 5 (2) of the Government of India (Adaptation of Indian Laws) Order, 1937.)

Serampore College, perhaps, is the only university in India, which is especially granted provision in its Act to award degrees in theology. During the discussion in the legislative Council, it was clearly understood that the theological degrees are meant for the students of all churches and there is a need to curtail the denominational limitations of the College⁴². There was some discussions at the Senate concerning the admission of students of other faiths for Serampore degrees⁴³, but the Senate resolutely did not favor such a prospect and advise students to seek admissions in secular universities and their departments in Religions and Christian Studies.⁴⁴ It, however, initiated a diploma course in Christian Studies for the people of all faiths and its Bachelor's degree in that branch was initially meant for them, but none came forward for the study and it is now offered to Christian lay people.

It may be noted that Aligarh Muslim University does offer B.Th, M.Th and Ph. D degrees in Shia and Sunni theology in its department of theology.⁴⁵ Recently, some deemed universities have also included theological studies in their programmes.⁴⁶ We must take note that the nomenclature of theological degrees is not notified by the UGC under the provisions of Article 22(3).⁴⁷ Serampore, as mentioned earlier, has pointed it out and had an answer from the Commission. It is also to be noted

that Serampore is the only independent university that is explicitly empowered to grant degrees in theology, and other universities, under the University Act of 1904, were advised not to grant degrees in theology. There is no indication, so far, that such a policy has changed, and others, including deemed universities, are now empowered to grant degrees in theology. There is a possibility that theological degrees will be granted, as in the West, by secular universities. If so, its implications has to be taken for serious consideration as universities which grant theological degrees will have to admit students without restrictions, and they have to be awarded to people of other faiths and equal opportunities have to be given to them with regards to professional opportunities in the universities concerned.

One corollary of the Article 13, should not be over-looked. The College can commence granting degrees in any branch of knowledge other than theology, if it fulfills the requirements imposed by the State Government. Its Senate, at present, is functioning only for the faculty of Theology. Senate, in the case College opts to offer degrees other than in the Faculty of Theology, shall have to be entrusted to activate all the apparatus required for the introduction of the degree programmes, regulations, curriculum, and syllabus, and arrange for the examination-process, declare the results and recommend to the Council for the award of the suggested degree/diploma.

Enlisting Serampore College (University) as university

This is a new phenomenon in our system as many universities are being established through the process of law by the state and central governments. Some time ago, many states governments were in the business of granting Acts to establish universities; UGC and the courts had to intervene to check this trend. The number of universities and degree granting institutions are increasing in number making it difficult for UGC to control the quality of education in this country. It now has a system by which universities and educational institutions are evaluated and graded through a scale of excellence for providing incentives for quality education and innovative programmes. As this involves a lot of financial commitment, listing has become a difficult proposition in the country.

Further a new category of 'universities' is evolved, such as deemed universities, self-financing universities, central universities, state universities, institutions of national importance etc., and one has to fit in one of this under a criteria. In a recent case, the Supreme Court has directed the UGC to enlist a particular university, which is duly established by an Act, but with a rider that UGC must form some guidelines or criteria to do so. Every one is waiting for the guidance from the UGC.

In the changed scenario, Serampore has to work out a system in consultation with the UGC. The nature and character of Serampore College (University) is quite different than any other university established/recognized under an Act of the State Assembly/parliament with so much history behind it. If the same nature and character is to be assigned to other universities, and they are also authorized to award theological degrees, its implications needs to be taken seriously by the churches and theological institutions. Serampore, on its part, has approached the UGC, and is waiting for the response from it.

Reflections for the future

Some time ago there was a suggestion for the establishment of a Catholic University which can take care of educational, secular and sacred, demands of Catholics community in India.⁴⁸ It did not occur to me that this possibility can also be looked into from the perception of Christian communality as a whole. This may be the right time that we should look at it as a genuine need of the Christian communities in this country, rising above the sectarian narrowness of vision and perspective. Serampore dream and experience, from its very beginning, was ecumenical and broad-based. Serampore College, with its Charter and Act, should come forward, on its own, to fill in the gap and help the Christian community to be an authentic witness for Christian service in all sphere of life of the Church in this land. Serampore can bring together Church leaders of all persuasions and work out a plan for a Christian University in India which can offer courses in all branches of knowledge while leaving the Theology Faculty, if Catholic Church so wishes, entirely as it is today.

Serampore College since its inception, concentrated in providing and strengthening primary and secondary education in Serampore, Bengal and missionary fields associated with the Baptist

Missionary Society. It saw to it that students are provided education in their own mother tongues and books and teaching manuals are provided for the educationists. The College continued to have its school section in Serampore till 1923 when it was moved to Bishnupur in Calcutta. It also discontinued Matriculation Examinations as secondary and higher secondary courses are well taken care of by our educational systems in the country. Under-graduate degree courses in Arts, Science and Commerce are conducted under University of Calcutta and in theology under Serampore's own system. The post-graduate degree and doctoral study programme is conducted only in Theology Department, and that too in cooperation with Bishop's College under federated faculty known as North India Institute for Post-graduate Theological Studies (NIIPGTS). There is no post-graduate study program in the College under University of Calcutta in Art-Science-Commerce Department. After continuing to serve the region and nation at under-graduate level in secular and theological degree programme since 1818, it may be a worthwhile suggestion, to ponder upon, for developing Serampore College at Post-graduate and research levels in secular and theological faculties.

We are entering into the last decade of commemorating 200 years of the significant and momentous service of Serampore College to the cause of secular and theological education in India, as well as its existence for 100 years as the only theological University in this land. It may be a tribute to the Founders, and all who labored here, if the College is declared a National Institute for higher learning in secular and theological faculties and its privilege in the Charter as enacted in the Act is fully realized and restored. The Church and Society needs to come forward, as Carey trusted them for the continuance of his work; the Government, then, may not oppose the idea.

Rev. Dr. Ravi Tiwari, is the Registrar of Senate of Serampore College since 2004. The views expressed in this article are his own personal reflections and do not, in any way, represent the official views of the Senate, or the Council. The article with documents, in the booklet form, is available at Senate office.

Inter University Board India: Hand-book of the Universities, 1953-54, p. I.

See also Appendices, Serampore College, Serampore, West Bengal, p.1196

University hand-book (25th Edition), Association of Indian Universities, New Delhi, 1992, p. IX

University News, Vol.45 No. 04, January 28-28, 2007, p. 6

Ashutosh Professor of History, University of Calcutta, and the Guest Editor of the volume quoted.

University News, op cit p. 106

Structures of University Education in India, UNESCO, Paris, 1952, p.3 (document is available at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0017/001790/179035eb.pdf>)

The document, prepared in consultation with eminent scholars and educationalists, including Chairperson, UGC, Vice-chancellors and civil servants, is available at

<http://education.nic.in/unhighedu.asp>, p.17. Mistake in date may be corrected; it is 1827, not 1829.

Regulations for Internal and External Candidate, Revised June, 1942, Senate of Serampore College, Serampore, p. 1; See also Ex/12.2.42, Res. I, p. 141

One should note the fact that Serampore College is the only University which is empowered to grant degrees in the faculty of theology and that is specifically mentioned in the Act. To my knowledge, Aligarh Muslim University is another University which offers degrees in Theology (BTh, MTh and Ph.D in Shia and Sunni theology). It is also to be noted that theology, in the context of Article 13 of the Serampore College Act, refers to Christian Theology and its theological degrees are offered only to Christian students and is not to the people of other faiths. This is also to be noted that Serampore does offer a diploma course which is open to all, irrespective of their faith perspectives.

The West Bengal Code-Volume III, Bengal Acts 1890 to 1919; Government of West Bengal, Law Department (Legislative), Calcutta. 1997

Proceedings, p. 69; Quotations are from the Proceedings, unless quoted otherwise

Ibid. Also noted in the Preamble of the Bill.

'The provisions of the said Royal Charter and of the Statutes and Regulations made there-under, so far as they are contrary to or inconsistent with any of the terms of this Act, shall be deemed to be superseded from the date of the commencement of this Act:

Provided that nothing in this Act shall render invalid any acts performed, duties imposed or liabilities incurred prior to the date on which this Act comes into force in accordance with the terms of the said Royal Charter, and of the Statutes and Regulations made there-under.'

Proceedings, p. 70

Ibid., p. 167

It was aptly noted by Rai Mahendra Chandra Mitra Bahadur, a member, that the Council of the Serampore College sits in London and the management of the College is left in the hands of the managing committee. See, Proceedings, p. 503

It is interesting to note the similar views of Lord Sinha, '...but what they desire to do so is to take power to themselves to form a Senate in which all Christian sects will be represented, so that their theological degrees would be valued not merely by particular sect to which the College belongs, but by all other sects of Christians'. See, Proceedings, p., 169

Ibid, p.163 ff.

Ibid. p. 166

The Story of Serampore and its College, The Council of Serampore College, Serampore, (4th Edition), 2005, p. 47

See, Bengal Act-1918, Preamble, Para 2

Proceedings, p. 166

Ibid. p. 502

Ibid. p. 164

Ibid.

Ibid., p.167

Ibid. 501

Cf. discussions in Proceedings, p. 501ff

Proceedings, p. 504

Ibid, p.169

Regulation 6

'In all universities, they are called Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science or Master of arts or Master of Science. I do not think that the Hon'ble Member is seriously suggesting that the titles to be conferred by the Serampore University should be other than these. Of course, to avoid any confusion, we have now B.A of the Calcutta University or B.A of the Bombay University and so on; and the same distinction will remain with regards to Serampore College University' (See, Proceedings, p. 504)

Cf. Ibid, p. 505: 'When the Serampore University will be constituted, I am entitled to submit to the Council that by law it may be enacted that the degrees which they may grant should be different from the degrees which are granted by the Calcutta or other Indian Universities'.

Ibid. p. 502

The section reads: 'for the purposes of this section, "degrees" means any such degree as may, with the previous approval of the Central government, be specified in this behalf by the Commission by notification in the official Gazette'.

Ex/10/1958; p. 66

Sen/15/1960.

Cf. *ibid.*, p. 167; Lord S. P. Sinha too was in agreement with view. See, p. 168

Ibid., 167

Ibid.

Proceedings, p. 70

Sen/8/28; also Sen/18/48

Universities of Mysore, Madras, Madurai-Kamraj and Patiala have department in Christian Studies/Religions

University Handbook (30th Edition-2004), Association of Indian Universities, AIU House, Kotla Marg, New Delhi, p.11

See Allahabad Agricultural Institute, University Handbook, *op cit.* p. 29

For the purposes of this section, 'degrees' means any such degree as may, with the previous approval of the Central Government, be specified in this behalf by the commission by notification in the official Gazette. (UGC Act, 1956)

See Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection; Vol.77, No.10; October, 2007, p. 742ff

