

From warriors of the past to leaders of tomorrow ~ Bethune College champions women's empowerment

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In the heart of Kolkata, where the tranquil Ganges' whispers mingle with the city's vibrant cacophony, there stands a bastion of knowledge that has weathered the sands of time – Bethune College. This venerable institution, with its yellow, white and crimson bricks, and ivy-clad walls, is not merely a physical edifice; it is a living testament to the intellectual vigour that has coursed through the veins of Bengal for well over a century.

In a bygone era, where horse-drawn carriages rumbled along cobbled streets, and gas lamps illuminated the evening air, it was amidst this sepia-toned backdrop that Bethune College was born, a beacon of enlightenment in the bustling heart of British colonial India. Established in 1879, it emerged as a bold assertion of the right to education for women, a time when such opportunities were scarcely afforded.

However, Bethune College owes its inception to John Elliot Drinkwater Bethune (1801-1851), who, along with Raja Dakshinranjan Mukhopadhyay, Ramgopal Ghosh and Pandit Madan Mohan Tarkalankar, established Calcutta Female School in 1849 – the first girls' school in Calcutta. J.E.D. Bethune, as the Law member of the Governor General's Council, championed education as a means of women empowerment and social reform. He personally funded the school until his passing in 1851, after which it was relocated and later became known as Bethune School. The school was reorganised in 1878 after merging with Banga Mahila Vidyalaya, shaping its future trajectory.

As the decades unfurled, Bethune's halls bore witness to the footsteps of trailblazers and pioneers, women who defied societal norms and carved their names into the annals of history. The likes of Dr Kadambini Ganguly (née Bose) (one of the first two female graduates of the British colonial empire alongside Chandramukhi Bose, who later moved on to become the first woman to get admission in Bengal Medical College), poet Kamini Roy, litterateur Priyambada Bagchi, social and political activist Sarala Devi Chaudhurani and nationalist revolutionary Pritilata Waddedar were among Bethune College's illustrious alumnae.

Starting in 1880,

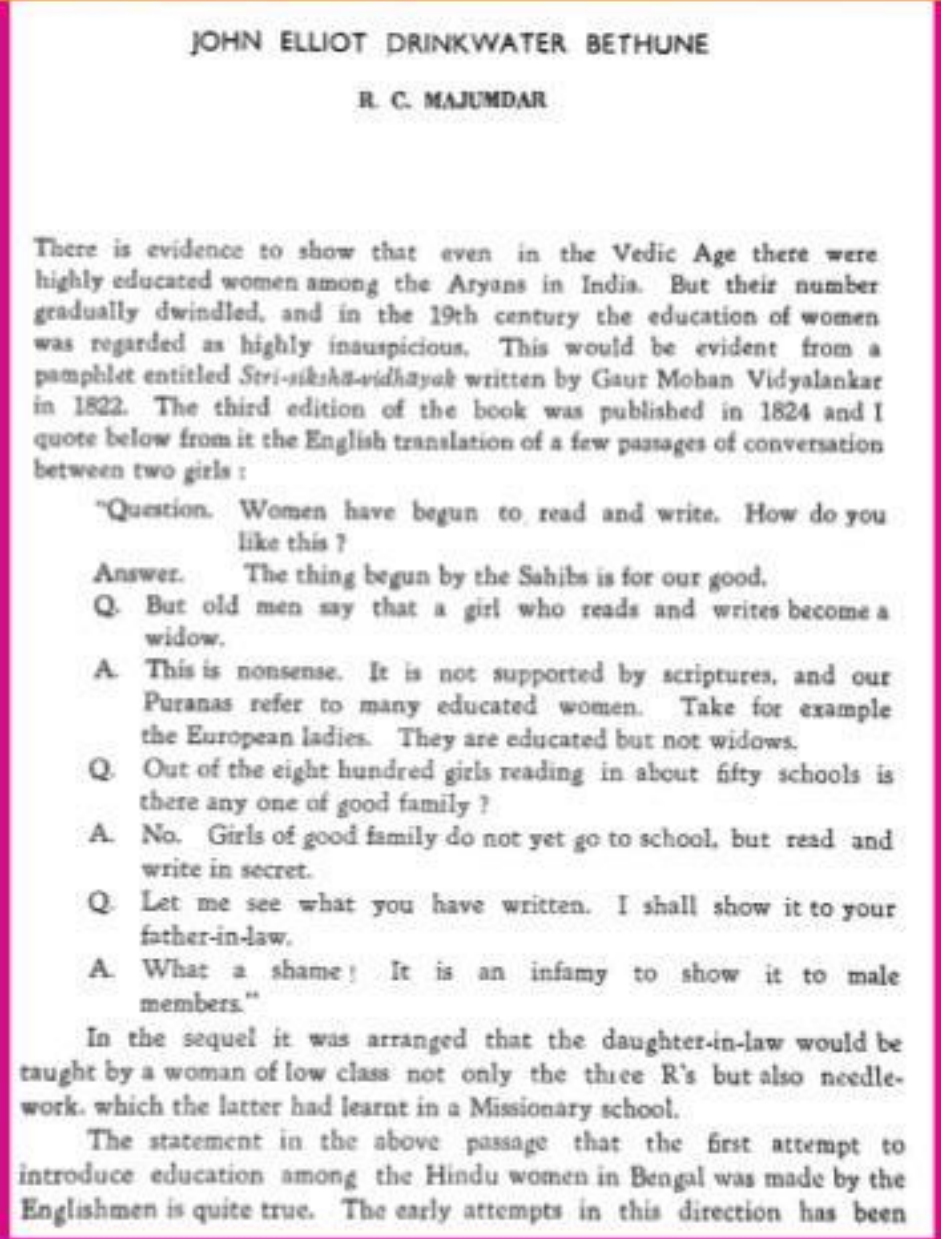
Bethune College welcomed female students from diverse religious backgrounds. Through political upheaval and cultural shifts, Bethune College stood steadfast, evolving with the times. Its curriculum, once confined to the liberal arts, expanded to encompass a diverse array of disciplines, from the sciences to the humanities. The once nascent seed of women's education had blossomed into a vibrant tapestry of academic pursuits. The college has been accredited with A+ in the 3rd cycle by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), and holds the 78th rank in NIRF.

Sitting in conversation with The Statesman, Dr Anushila Hazra Bhattacharya, officer-in-charge of the Bethune College, said, "Over the past 144 years, the Bethune College has nurtured some of society's most exceptional women, beginning with Kadambini Ganguly and Chandramukhi Bose. The institution stands as a living testament to the vision of its founder, John Elliot Drinkwater Bethune, and remains dedicated to the advancement of women through education. Though times have changed, the college has maintained its academic legacy."

Neena Gupta, an alumna of Bethune College stands as a living testament to Dr Bhattacharya's words. In 2021, Gupta was awarded the Ramanujan Prize for young mathematicians for her series of outstanding work in affine algebraic geometry and commutative algebra, particularly for the Zariski Cancellation Problem, that had remained unsolved for 60 years until 2014 when she cracked it.

"The college strives for the all-round development of its students, fostering group activities, interactive sessions, engagement in both intra- and inter-college events, and involvement in social welfare initiatives. The enduring legacy of formidable women such as Bina Das and Pritilata Waddedar serves as an ongoing well-spring of inspiration for successive generations of Bethune students," added Dr Bhattacharya.

The college also has a National Service Scheme (NSS) unit, which was formalised in 2006. It is incorporated as a dedicated session within the college schedule on Saturdays. NSS Volunteers are required to fulfil a commitment of 120 hours of regular service annually. "Our college has taken under its wing a local



slum community. Students actively participate in teaching sessions and engage in a range of social outreach endeavours within this area. They also take up the important task of advocating for female hygiene among the pavement dwellers, while simultaneously organising cleanliness campaigns to foster a greener environment, said Dr Bhattacharya.

In a bid to facilitate a more fulfilling and balanced life for both students and staff, Bethune College established its Psychological Counselling Cell in 2005. Staffed by experienced members of the psychology department, the cell is dedicated to addressing the emotional well-being of individuals associated with the college, including students, faculty, and administrative staff.

Talking to The Statesman, Prof (Dr) Nilanjana Bagchi, head of the department of psychology, and secretary, Teachers' Council, delved into the counselling support offered to the stu-

dents, and the teaching and non-teaching staff of the institution. "During the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of people seeking psychological counselling increased drastically. During the lockdown, individuals experienced heightened levels of paranoia, anxiety, and depression due to prolonged isolation. In response, our mental health counsellors diligently focused on enhancing the overall satisfaction and resourcefulness of individuals, addressing the emotional needs of both students and staff. The cell also deals with cases of post-traumatic stress disorders, domestic violence and/or incest at home, marital and behavioural problems, lack of adjustment with the parents and mostly broken relationships."

The college also has an anti-ragging cell constituted as per the existing UGC norms, with a zero-tolerance policy towards ragging. At the start of each academic year, the college ensures that both incoming fresh-

men and senior students are well-informed about the rules and regulations pertaining to ragging.

"Our college prides itself on having an apolitical student body. We also place a strong emphasis on inclusivity, advocating for the rights of the LGBTQ community," added Prof (Dr) Bagchi.

Bethune College also provides hostel accommodation at Karunamoyee, Salt Lake, with a capacity to accommodate up to 150 students. The Government of West Bengal has instituted a bus service for convenient transportation between the hostel and the college, ensuring a seamless commute for students.

The college offers several disciplines like Bengali, English, Hindi, Sanskrit, botany, chemistry, computer science, economics, history, mathematics, philosophy, physics, psychology, political science, statistics and zoology. There are undergraduate courses, postgraduate courses and a general course, Women Studies. The UGC-approved Women Studies Centre was established in 2010.

This curriculum offers a comprehensive perspective on gender studies, encompassing topics such as the inception of the discipline, feminist theories and ideologies, patriarchal structures and institutions, issues like foeticide, infanticide, rape, dowry, child labour, early marriage, domestic abuse, trafficking, women's empowerment, portrayal of women in media, existing legislation, LGBTQ rights, self-help groups, and micro-finance for women's empowerment. Additionally, under the new CBCS system, the syllabus places emphasis on feminist research and project work for internal assessments. The teaching methodology involves a combination of lectures, assignments, and hands-on projects addressing gender-related con-

dimensions of ethics. "The Ethics and Value Education Committee orchestrates a series of enlightening lectures featuring distinguished speakers from various domains. Students are also taken on field trips, ensuring that their learning experience extends beyond conventional moral science classes and is far from mundane," added Dr Bhattacharya.

"The college campus is home to a rich biodiversity, featuring an abundance of birds and fruit bats. Additionally, it harbours a variety of medicinal plants that prove invaluable to botany students," remarked Prof (Dr) Bagchi.

An active Career Counselling Cell of Bethune College provides guidance on various career opportunities, aiding them in charting their professional paths. The cell conducts a range of activities throughout the year, including seminars

convenience, separate libraries cater to the needs of both the science and the humanities disciplines. Additionally, each department maintains its own departmental library under its supervision. Complementing the physical resources, the library also subscribes to a selection of approximately 12 journals and magazines. The library also houses 42 Braille books. The Bethune College archive also houses a collec-



cerns, along with a focus on fostering gender sensitisation.

Students have the opportunity to access financial assistance through scholarships, stipends, free studentships, and other forms of aid from both governmental (including Kanyashree and Aikyashree schemes) and non-governmental sources. In addition, the college administers a Students' Aid Fund, offering further financial support to those in need.

Commenting about the new National Education Policy, officer-in-charge Dr Bhattacharya said, "It is all set to commence this year. Apart from the four-year honours courses, students will also be able to opt for interdisciplinary courses (IDCs). We've reached out to the concerned authorities for expansion of classrooms in order to be able to accommodate the students for the IDCs."

With the government giving importance to value education, Bethune College has a mandatory 30-hour certificate course on Ethics and Value Education. This course aims to instil in students a sense of social responsibility and imbue them with moral values, ultimately enhancing their quality of life through education. Embracing an interdisciplinary approach, the content encompasses both theoretical and practical

and workshops on prospects in higher studies and employment in both government and private sectors. Additionally, workshops focused on developing communicative and soft skills in English are organised. For tailored guidance, individualised personal career counselling is offered, with dedicated professors in each department providing subject-specific advice. The college also facilitates campus selection programs with reputable companies such as Tata Consultancy Services, Cognizant Solutions, Genpact, Wipro, and Netscribes.

The library boasts an extensive collection comprising approximately 100,000 books and journals, which encompasses several rare and invaluable volumes. An annual addition of 1,100 new books further enriches this repository. To enhance accessibility and

tion of 240 classified files, with 145 of them having been digitised, laminated, and catalogued. Alongside these, there are unclassified files in the archive. The collection also features about 100 laminated vintage photographs. Noteworthy items in the archive include a letter penned by Chandramukhi Bose in 1890, a message from principal AL Janau to students in 1917, and a letter written by Pritilata Waddedar in 1931.

Today, as we walk through Bethune College's verdant campus, we're reminded of the countless stories that echo within its hallowed halls. The spirit of inquiry, of audacity, of breaking barriers, is palpable in the air. Bethune College, with its fusion of tradition and modernity, is not just an institution; it is a living, breathing testament to the indomitable spirit of learning.

St. Joseph & Mary's School — A shrine for excellence

A roving leather technologist anchored in Calcutta in 1963 and started a nursery school at 586, Block N, New Alipore, on 16 January of the same year. He was an Englishman, PT Lumb, and the founder of St. Joseph & Mary's School. After the sad demise of his wife, he left for England.

But that did not hinder the growth of the school. It was then being run by S Goswami, who was the principal, and Ratan Kanti Bose, the secretary.

The school got its own building and affiliation with the ICSE in 1980, when Prof. RK Mahalanobis of Jadavpur University took over as the secretary. AL Das provided valued guidance and always encouraged members of the staff. A handful of students appeared for the ICSE in 1980. Meanwhile, Prof. SC Shome, the former principal of Presidency College, took over as secretary and helped the school tide over all hurdles.

The 1983 ICSE batch did well, and the first girl of the batch went on to top the BCom finals, securing record marks and also topped the CA finals. The second girl also made her mark by

From the desk of the principal

Dear Children,

Greetings from St. Joseph & Mary's School family !!

Our school is a holy shrine of education, art, culture, physical development and superb mental hygiene. A new global period is in the offing, where the development of every child is paramount. Every school in our country and in the world plays its own role in accordance with chance, convenience and opportunity.

St. Joseph & Mary's School is one of those schools that paves the way for the forthcoming competent citizens of the country and the world.

We prepare competent students to work and stand in every corner of our country and that of the world with dignity, adeptability, dexterity, brilliance and courage.

St. Joseph & Mary's School is a growing human family where we are all members, and teachers are definitely your guides, and I happen to be your chieftain.

coming fifth in the WBCS exam and is at present an honourable judge at Howrah Court. Despite economic and

other impediments, our students have done well for themselves, joining IITs and many others studying abroad.



I bless you all from the very core of my soul for your brilliant success in every physical, mental, and spiritual step of life.

Chevalier Dr Bhakta Sunder Sharma, Principal Secretary

MA (Eng), B.Ed, Ph.D (Interamerican University, U.S.A.)

MBA (Fellow of American Institute of Management Science)

chemistry department, Bethune College) and Prof. Manotosh Dasgupta (chemistry, Presidency College) as the chairperson and secretary, respectively.

The school joined the Interact Club under the able guidance of Anjan Kar (Rotaract), a former student of St. Joseph & Mary's School. At the school, Chaiti Pramanick, Sumitra Roy, Bishnupriya Biswas and Ratna Roy were in charge, while Neeraj Bhowani was the president of the club at the school.

A literacy programme (each one teaches one) has been inaugurated by Lt Pankaj Banerjee. An eminent eye surgeon, Dr Rohatgi, conducted an eye camp.

The old age home of Tollygunge was visited by at least 40 members of our Interact Club along with the patron teachers, with Anjan Kar at the top of the list.

It was a novel experience for all, and we were fascinated in the real sense of the term.

Our students took part in the GK test conducted by the USO. Certificates and prizes were given away to successful students. Our children participated in the Bournvita Quiz Contest too,

