

# ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF THE ASSOCIATION OF ENGINEERS

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A.D. 1918. Old boys of Sibpore Engineering College (now known as B. E. College) have come to attend the annual Reunion. Reunion meeting was over and dinner was scheduled at 8 p.m. So, the interval of gay evening was opportune for an informal get-together in the spacious greens of the beloved college. Gossip, tittle-tattle, chat, pleasant retrospection of good old days, reminiscence of chums and teachers, marked the occasion. In one such groups, someone became rather serious or constructive and proposed that they should meet on many more occasions in such atmosphere, to have happy time out of work. He was none other than Jatindranath Banerjee and his proposal received spontaneous applause. Not in mere words but in actions too—Chandrakanta Ghosh at once invited all present to his house (10 Rammohan Roy Road) the next week end, to work out the idea. They met, talked at subsequent weekend also. Number of promoters swelled and financial solvency was attained from donations. A spatial flat in the second floor was rented in Mirjapur Street (now Surjya Sen Street) near college square.

There were regular gatherings in this flat. One evening Narendra Kumar Bhattacharjee, Asstt. Chief Electrical Inspector to the Govt. of Bengal, who was an Associate member of the Institution of Electrical Engineers, England, proposed that their organisational set up should be on the same lines as the British Institution but the term "Institution" should be replaced by "Association". The proposal was heralded unanimously and immediately a committee was

formed with Narendra Kumar Bhattacharjee as chairman and Chandrakanta Ghosh, Jatindranath Banerjee, R. K. Ganguly, Jogeshchandra Ganguly and few others as members. They drafted the memorandum and formed committee.

The plenipotentiary committee consisted of Satishchandra Mitra, Chief Engineer, Calcutta Corporation as chairman; Sureshchandra Sanyal, District Engineer, Calcutta Corporation as secretary; Jogeshchandra Ganguly, Asstt. Engineer, Braithwaite Co. as assistant secretary; Jatindranath Banerjee, Building Surveyor, Calcutta Corporation as treasurer. Satishchandra Mitra could not serve long. So, Dr. S. K. Dutta on his return from Germany, took over. He was the first President of the Association. Dr. Dutta was a teacher in Sibpore College prior to his departure for Germany. With his experience abroad, he started with full vigour to put the Association on sound footing, but his untimely death was a blow to the Association. His place was taken by Prof. B. C. Gupta, Head of the electrical engineering department of Sibpore Engineering College and the only Indian Professor. At his instance, engineers from Sibpore College joined in large numbers. In those days Sibpore Engineering College was the solitary institution in Burma, Assam, Bihar, Orissa, Madhyapradesh, Nepal and Calcutta University was the only University.

Sibpore engineers were joined by another group of engineers who studied engineering in U. K. and were mostly graduates of Glasgow

University. They were frustrated to find that foreigners with much inferior qualifications could vie with them and secure job and with comparatively higher foreign qualifications, they were vanquished in the struggle for existence. They joined the Sibpore engineers to make the Association a strong forum and pioneers of the Association are engineers from Sibpore and Glasgow.

A. D. 1919. It was fourteen years after the movement for unsettling the partition of Bengal and two years ahead of national awakening, throbbing for struggle for emancipation. Like others, Indian engineers were also victims of differential treatment in the hands of foreign administration. Industry was in the hands of foreigners who imported covenanted hands from home. Less qualified people, from abroad and particular community in India, could get a job in foreign concern or even in Government department, in preference to qualified Indian engineers. Railways were run by private companies incorporated in England. There were two grades for same responsibility—one for Indian and one for Anglo-Indian and European. Even in the amenities in public utility concern, there were discrimination. There was "European third class" with first class amenities and third class fare. In Government service, if an Indian could rise as the chief engineer, it was deemed an exception. Silhouetted against such environment, qualified young engineers found enough grouse to organise themselves to fight it out.

The constitution of the Association was drawn up on the same lines as the Institution of Civil Engineers, the oldest institution in the world. It was named the "Association of Engineers (Bengal)". The main objects were: (1) safeguarding and promoting the status of engineers; (2) research for development of engineering; (3) dissemination of engineering

news through journal and reading of papers; (4) establishment of a library.

The activities of young Indian engineers did not escape the eyes of alien rulers. British engineers in this country were up in their loins to form an institution of their own. They did not deviate from the policy of 'divide et impera' and could successfully rope in Sir Rajendra Mukherjee of Martin & Co., though he had no engineering degree. Attempts were made to foil the British design by impressing on Sir Rajendra Mukherjee to dissociate himself, from the British move and work for the Association of Engineers. He did not yield to requests. So, the Association had to struggle from the very inception. In one of their meetings, the British President of the Institution of Engineers, made some offending remarks about Indian Engineers and as a protest, many self-respecting Indian engineers severed their connection; under the leadership of Rai Bahadur Girish Chandra Das, Chief Engineer, Martin & Co., who worked till the last day of his life for the Association of Engineers.

With the expansion of sphere of activities, engineers from other provinces became members of the Association. It was, at this stage, considered prudent to give the Association an All-India character, by deleting the suffix "Bengal" and registering it under the Societies Act as "Association of Engineers". The seed planted in the green lawn of Sibpore College, thus developed to a small plant. Sri Suresh Chandra Sanyal was the first secretary and Sri Jogesh Chandra Ganguli was the first editor. Sri Jogesh Chandra Banerjee, the Vice President, got the Association affiliated to the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce and Industry. In the year 1932, the Association applied to the Corporation of Calcutta for 13 cottas of land for construction of museum, library and night school. In the year 1934, syllabus

for examination of candidates for membership of various grades was prepared. The Association representative Rai Bahadur Girish Chandra Das was connected with engineering faculty of the Calcutta University. Professor S. P. Ganguli of McIllegan College, Lahore initiated the compilation of engineering terms in Bengali and these were published regularly in the Association Journal. The 'Paribhasha Samsad' of the West Bengal Government sought assistance of the association regarding compilation of technical terms and these were duly complied with. Among the vanguards of the Association, the names of Rai Bahadur Girish Chandra Das, Rai Bahadur Amarnath Das, Dr. B. N. De, S. N. Ghosh, Jiten Das Gupta, P. C. Bose, Sachin Bandopadhyay, Haren Banerjee, Kalidas Roy, Nagendranath Sen, Dr. J. N. Basu, Amulya Sen will remain written in letters of gold for their sincere effort to advance the cause of the Association.

The Silver Jubilee was celebrated with due pomp.

In the year 1949, an application was submitted to the Government of India for award of charter to which the Govt. made a counter proposal for merging with the Institution of Engineers. This proposal was discarded though there were many Government service holders in the Association. The application form of the Institution of Engineers contained a clause "When did you arrive in India", which implies, beyond doubt that the Institution of Engineers is foreign-based and owes allegiance to England. Members of our Association could not accept a proposal derogatory to the self respect of Indians. The Association did not get a charter and could not enroll students in thousands. Neither its membership could be used as a passport for securing Government jobs. In spite of this the Association has lived for fifty years.

In the year, 1962, some interpellations were

made during the budget session, regarding the recognition of the oldest India-based organisation. Sri Humayun Kabir, replied on behalf of the Government that request for recognition "has not been accepted so far". How far is "so far" is now the question to be reckoned. Of course, Sri Kabir indicated out of Loksabha that the obstacle for recognition was coming from another institution which wants monopoly in the matter. There were comments in Ananda Bazar Patrika, Jugantar, Swadhinata and other papers for Govt. recognition.

In the year 1963, two representatives of the Association met Sri P. C. Sen, Chief Minister of West Bengal on the 10th August. Verbal assurance of grant for Library was given by the chief minister but nothing was forthcoming. Of course, the education ministry at the centre, encouraged us for continuation of activities for "promotion of engineering knowledge and engineering profession". In 1963, the foreign ministry requested for sending delegate to the Afro-Asia housing congress at Ciaro and delegate of the Association of Engineers attended the Cairo congress. Observer was sent to the British fair. A delegate was nominated to the International conference in Japan. These are illustrations to show Govt. recognition.

In the year 1968, the Association took the initiative for convening the first All India Engineers' Conference. The Joint Council of professional engineering bodies also owes its existence at the initiative of the Association.

Fifty years may appear too long a period but in the march of time, 50 years is not a long stride to achieve total success. Our relentless struggle will continue, with the sympathy of our people.

We celebrate the Golden Jubilee now and would hope for the centenary celebration with greater achievement, more eclat.