

In Bapu's footsteps

Prasita Mukherjee and Malini Bhattacharya
write on the past and present of Sree Shikshayatan
College and the heritage it nurtures

*Intellectually, mentally and spiritually, a woman is
equivalent to a male and she can participate in every
activity.*
— Mahatma Gandhi

SRI Sitaram Seksaria, the founder of Shri Shikshayatan College was perhaps motivated by a similar ideal while contemplating an institution for women's education and his vision culminated in the Shri Shikshayatan school and college which were set up in 1954-55. The DRS Programme in the Department of English, Calcutta University, has chosen this college as its fifth venture under the purview of the women's college documentation project.

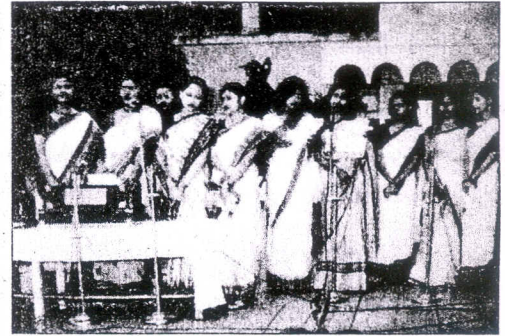
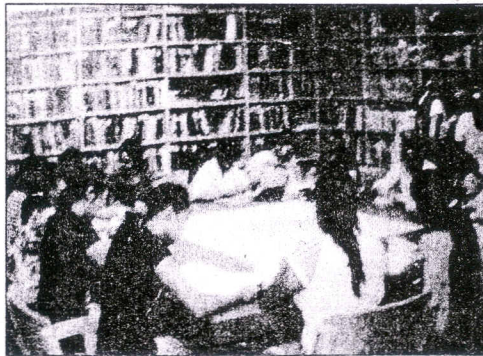
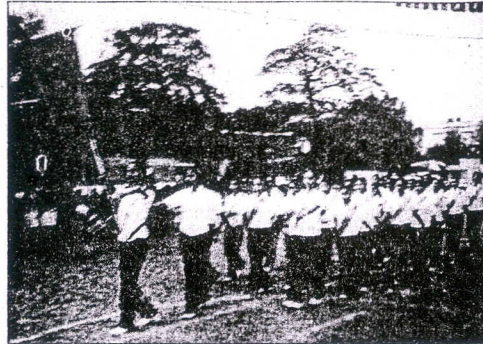
A part of the Constructive Programme of Mahatma Gandhi that aimed at inculcating a system whereby the entire community would be benefited, Shri Sitaram Seksaria decided to dedicate himself to the cause of women's emancipation. Women's education was a scheme under this programme and Seksaria along with Bhagirath Kanoria, GD Birla, PD Himmatsinka, Ishwar Das Jalan, Jammalal Bajaj and BM Singhi inspired other members of their community to contribute towards improving the condition of women, which, they believed, could be achieved through education alone. They were motivated to give up all luxurious practices and women from these families also came forward to donate money and jewels to further this noble cause.

Seksaria hailed from one such business family, who became a social reformer and visionary during the latter course of his life. Born into a Marwari Agarwal family in 1891 in Nawalgarh, Rajasthan, he was a part of the family's business in Calcutta till when he was 30, after which he was engaged in other ventures along with active participation in the stock markets. He discontinued all business ventures that he was engaged with to make himself available for social uplift, and perhaps his first endeavour as a philanthropist was to open a library in Nawalgarh at the age of 17.

An active member of the political struggle that enmeshed Indian sentiments during that era, he was arrested five times between 1930 and 1942. In the sphere of women's education in colonial India his contribution was immense. With assistance from Bhagirath Kanoria, the Marwari Balika Vidyalaya was established in 1920 and Seksaria had to literally plead and persuade the then conservative parents of the Marwari community to send their daughters to school.

These joint ventures were the stepping stone for the magnum opus project of constructing a school and a college adjacent to his residence on Lord Sinha Road which bore fruit when he became the secretary of the Marwari Balika Vidyalaya educational trust and Shri Shikshayatan College was founded shortly after on 8 July 1955. With only 32 students at the onset it evolved over the years and is currently regarded as one of the premier institutions with a strength of around 2,500 students.

It started out as an intermediate college of arts and then became a degree college with departments like



English, Hindi, political science, geography and philosophy. The BEd department came into being in 1963 followed by the plus-two level in 1978 and BCom in 1982. Presently, the College provides BA and BSc (Honours and/or General) courses in English, Bengali, Hindi, education, history, geography, philosophy, mathematics, statistics, economics, political science, sociology, botany, zoology, chemistry and Urdu along with the BCom Honours and General courses. These apart, self-financing courses have been introduced to provide professional acumen to students to enable them to strive better in our present competitive world. The courses that have been selected are Bachelors in business administration, journalism and mass communication, computer application and communicative English. An erudite faculty, headed by the teacher-in-charge Anuradha Banerjee, ably manages the varied curriculum.

Students have been provided with the best amenities to facilitate learning and nurture talent. A resourceful library helps them to inculcate the habit of reference study. Moreover, a yoga and choreography room, a common room with a gymnasium, swimming pool, language laboratory, computer laboratories, media laboratory and a hygienic and well-maintained canteen caters to the other requirements of students. Underprivileged students are of major concern and certain scholarships and freeship programmes along with a Book Bank facility are maintained for their benefit. All students also enjoy certain medical benefits.

Extra-curricular activities are also encouraged and have been incorporated within the schedule. Various societies like the choir and choreography, drama, debate and art assemble regularly for meetings and practice sessions seasoned with advice and guidance from teachers. Social and environmental awareness are sought to be roused by programmes like the NSS and the Environment Club. The inter-college fest Srijan is organised every year along with other events like the Annual Function and Sports Day. The College Foundation Day is also celebrated with zest by the faculty and students. The college also boasts of an active alumni association which meets once every year to rejuvenate fond memories of yesteryears. Another pre-puja landmark affair organised by the College is Shree — the art and cuisine fair showcasing exquisite items. Participants donate the sale proceeds towards social welfare activities.

With Gandhian ideals still in place, the College has traversed a long way and has contributed towards women's development by educating them in large numbers right from the primary to the undergraduate level. The institution has always reflected an open mind and has introduced new teaching-learning programmes for the benefit of future generations.

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