Jadavpur University: Whodunnit?

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Abstract

This essay has two goals with respect to Jadavpur University: to identify its correct institutional lineage, and to determine whether a single person can be considered to be the founder of its formative process. To achieve these goals, the essay examines the history of the process that led to the formation of Jadavpur University. The historical evidence examined in this essay shows that the Bengal Technical Institute which was formed in 1906 is the proper ancestor of Jadavpur University. Further, the evidence is not compatible with a 'single founder hypothesis' for the formative process of the university.

Keywords: Jadavpur University, National Education Movement, National Council of Education, Society for the Promotion of Technical Education, Bengal Technical Institute, Bengal National College, Satish Chandra Mukherjee, Taraknath Palit, Rash Bihari Ghosh, Aurobindo Ghosh.

1 Introduction

Jadavpur University [4] is a premier university in the state of West Bengal in India. Recently, there has been a call (see for example [1, 7]) to rename the university in honour of Sri Aurobindo (also called Rishi Aurobindo, and who, in the earlier phase of his life, was known as Aurobindo Ghosh). The stated rationale behind this call is the claim that Sri Aurobindo was the founder of Jadavpur University. In fact, the newspaper article [1] directly quotes a present-day political personality as stating that the creator of Jadavpur University was Sri Aurobindo.

This leads to two separate questions:

- Is it justified to rename Jadavpur University?
- Can Sri Aurobindo be considered to be the creator or the founder of Jadavpur University?

Our goal is to consider the second question in a much more general form. As for the first question, we share a few comments.

Note. Before diving into details, we would like to clarify that the purpose of the present essay is academic and not political. In particular, we carry out a dispassionate historical study without any political undertones.

Renaming Question

The naming and renaming of an educational organisation depends on a variety of factors. In many cases, a basic feature of such naming is to include the geographical scope and the subject of study. For example, in the context of Bengal, the names of the institutions Calcutta Medical College (set up in 1835) and the Bengal Engineering College (set up in 1856) clearly specify their geographical and educational scopes.

Sometimes, educational institutes are set up with one name and then renamed after the founder. An example is the Calcutta Female School which was set up in 1849 by John Elliot Drinkwater Bethune, and renamed as the Bethune School in 1862-63 by the government which took over the school in 1856 after Bethune's passing away in 1851. Another example is the Institute of Nuclear Physics which was founded by Meghnad Saha in 1950 and was renamed as the Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics some time after Meghnad Saha passed away in 1956. On the other hand, the Indian Statistical Institute (founded in 1931) by Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis, has continued with the same name even after the passing away of Mahalanobis in 1972. The international recognition and legacy associated with the name of an institute arguably have a 'brand value' which goes beyond the name of the founder.

There are examples of educational institutes which have been named after persons who passed away before such institutions were founded. Examples are Netaji Subhas Open University, Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research, Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law, and Deen Dayal Upadhyaya College, Delhi. There is also at least one example where an educational institute was named after a living individual who in a strict sense was not the founder – the C. R. Rao Advanced Institute of Mathematics, Statistics and Computer Science in Hyderabad was named in honour of C. R. Rao at the time of its founding in 2007, while he was still alive.

Sometimes, educational institutes have a long and complex history, making it difficult to name or rename the institute in the memory of a single person. One such example is the Hindu College in Calcutta, which was set up in 1817, and after government take over in 1855 was renamed the Presidency College, and is presently called the Presidency University.

In view of the above, there is no definite answer to the question of whether an educational institute should be (re)named after one particular person. As in the case of the Indian Statistical Institute, a long standing name carries an international recognition which would be compromised if it were to be changed.

We leave the (re)naming question at this point and get into the main question that we investigate in this essay.

Lineage and Founder Questions

We now turn to the second question. Note that the terms 'creator' and 'founder' are not synonymous. Unlike the term 'founder' for which we stipulate a testable criterion below, the notion of 'creator' arguably has no concrete definition in the present context; without such a definition, it is not possible to test the notion of 'creator' against the available historical evidence, and so we do not attempt to adjudicate on this notion.

We primarily focus on institutional lineage and on the question of whether based on historical evidence a single individual can be reasonably identified to be the founder of the university.

Rather than focusing on Sri Aurobindo, we formulate the following much more general question.

> What is the true lineage of Jadavpur University and, in particular, was Jadavpur University founded by a single person?

The word 'founder' can be understood in different ways. For the sake of concreteness, we stipulate that the attribution of an institution to a single founder should require evidence of significantly greater contribution by the individual to the formation of the institution compared to all of the other people who also contributed to the formative process. Here the notion of contribution is to be understood in general terms covering conceptual, moral, inspirational, financial, and organisational issues.

To answer the above question, we start with a timeline of events leading up to the formation of Jadavpur University. Our timeline is based on the following two books.

Education for Industrialization, written by Benoy Kumar Sarkar and published in 1946 [9].

The Origins of the National Education Movement (1905–1910), written by Haridas Mukherjee and Uma Mukherjee, which was published in 1957 [5].

We note that both the books are from around the middle of the twentieth century. Given that Jadavpur University evolved over the period 1905 to 1955, the books capture contemporary events and also quote from primary sources. Further, Benoy Kumar Sarkar was personally involved in the National Education Movement and was also a faculty member (in 1907 [9, p. 83]) of the Bengal National College which grew out of this movement. So his account of the history was a first hand account. At the same time, one may consider Benoy Kumar Sarkar's narrative to be biased in favour of one ideology over another. While it is difficult to make a wholesale refutation of such a charge, we note that on at least one important point, he provides an unbiased view. As part of the National Education Movement, Benoy Kumar Sarkar was on the side of the Bengal National College; however, he clearly identifies the shortcomings of the College towards technical education, and clinically identifies that in the 1910-20 decade, the Bengal National College died out, while the Bengal Technical Institute survived. We discuss this point in more detail below.

A basic purpose of investigating the timeline is to construct the chronology of events which led to the formation of Jadavpur University. To emphasise the chronology, we alternate between providing a pointwise summary of important events, and relevant explanatory text. This is a somewhat unusual mode of writing, but we believe that for our purpose of highlighting the chronological unfolding of events, this mode of writing helps the reader visualise the chronology much better than the standard flowing text style of writing.

A popularly held belief is that an institution called the Bengal National College was the ancestor of present-day Jadavpur University. A contemporary newspaper report [7] makes the following explicit statement:

> Aurobindo Ghosh, who played a significant role in the freedom movement before becoming a spiritual philosopher, was the first principal of the Bengal National College in 1906, and the institute later became Jadavpur University in 1955.

On the other hand, the Wikipedia page [10] for Jadavpur University mentions that it

> was established on 25 July in 1906 as Bengal Technical Institute and was converted into Jadavpur University on 24 December in 1955.

The webpage [4] of Jadavpur University itself mentions that the university originated

> in the anti-colonial National Council of Education, Bengal (1906).

Given the various statements regarding the origin of Jadavpur University, it becomes an interesting academic exercise to investigate the true lineage of the university.

Our detailed historical analysis shows the belief that the Bengal National College became Jadavpur University is incorrect and that the Bengal Technical Institute is the true ancestor of Jadavpur University.

The correctness of the statement that the National Council of Education (NCE) of 1906 is the origin of Jadavpur University is nuanced. In 1906, the Bengal Technical Institute was created under the aegis of a parent body, called the Society for the Promotion of Technical Education (SPTE), which was itself formed that year. In 1910, the SPTE was amalgamated into the NCE and the united body continued under the name of NCE. In 1906, the NCE had created the Bengal National College. Post-1910, the NCE ran both the Bengal National College and the Bengal Technical Institute. The Bengal National College withered away in the 1910-20 decade and was closed in 1920. The Bengal Technical Institute continued and subsequently underwent a change of name in 1929 to become the College of Engineering and Technology. In 1955, it is the College of Engineering and Technology run by the NCE that became the Jadavpur University. So while one may say that Jadavpur University originated in the NCE, if one refers to the year 1906, then strictly speaking it would be proper to say that Jadavpur University originated in the SPTE.

As for the question of whether there is a single founder of Jadavpur University, one may distinguish between the formation of the university in 1955 and the process that started in 1905. The question of who founded the Jadavpur University in 1955 has a clear answer: Bidhan Chandra Roy, since he, as the President of the NCE and the Chief Minister of West Bengal, piloted the transition from the College of Engineering and Technology to Jadavpur University. On the other hand, if we look for a single founder in the formative process that started in 1905, then it turns out that the answer is in the negative. As we elaborate below, Jadavpur University was created out of a historical process where a group of brilliant and committed individuals played significant parts. It is, however, difficult to identify one single person to have played a dominant role in the path to the creation of the university.

We systematically go through the available historical evidence to establish the true lineage of Jadavpur University and establish that there is no single founder of the university. Our systematic untangling of the events brings clarity to the confusion regarding the lineage and founder questions of Jadavpur University.

2 Early Developments

Our story begins with Satish Chandra Mukherjee. The first two major events of the story are the following.

1897: Satish Chandra Mukherjee founded the monthly *Dawn magazine* and was its editor from 1897 to 1913. According to Mukherjee and Mukherjee [5, p. 216]: "The ... policy of the journal was ... cosmopolitan or all-embracing."

1902: Satish Chandra Mukherjee founded the Dawn Society. The goal of the Society was two-fold, first to impart religious and moral instructions, and to supplement the usual education provided in different colleges. The "fundamental ideal that inspired this double line of action was to train up the students as patriots and workers for the country's cause." (See [5, p. 225]).

When the National Education Movement started in October-November 1905, the Dawn Society became one of the most active centres. Among the workers of the Dawn Society were Haran Chandra Chakladar, Radha Kumud Mukherjee, Kishori Mohan Gupta, Rabindra Narayan Ghose and Benoy Kumar Sarkar. These were also the people who constituted the core faculty members of the Bengal National College and School when it was formed later in 1906.

The formation of the National Education Movement needs to be seen against some of the policies of the British government as outlined below.

1902: The Indian Universities Commission was appointed under Thomas Raleigh. The recommendations of the Commission were viewed by Indians as measures to control and interfere in the administration of indigenous institutions.

1904: The Universities Act, based on the recommendations of the Indian Universities Commission, was passed by Lord Curzon.

7 August 1905: A meeting at the Calcutta Town Hall launched the Swadeshi movement.

16 October 1905: The partition of Bengal was enacted by Lord Curzon. The proposal for partition was officially announced earlier on 19 July 1905.

22 October 1905: The Carlyle circular was published. The circular restricted students' participation in political activities, with the objective of prohibiting protest against the partition of Bengal.

The unfolding of various events including the perceived British interference in university education and the overall nationalistic feeling led to the impetus for the ultimate formation of the National Council of Education (NCE) and the Society for the Promotion of Technical Education (SPTE). The immediate spark was provided by the persecution (fines and suspension from classes) of the students of the Rangpur Zillah School and the local Technical School for opposing the partition of Bengal in October and early November 1905.

3 Preparation for Setting up of the NCE

November 1905 was a period of intense activities. The timeline is summarised below.

2 November 1905: A students' meeting was held on the ground of the Field and Academy Club, which was attended by Rabindranath Tagore, Satish Chandra Mukherjee, and others.

5 November 1905: A students' meeting was held at the Dawn Society, which was attended by about 2000 students, and was addressed by Rabindranath Tagore, Satish Chandra Mukherjee, and others. In particular, Satish Chandra Mukherjee impressed upon the students to sever all connections with government universities and also to boycott examinations.

8 November 1905: The Rangpur National School was established "with the object of providing education both general and technical." (See [5, p. 30]). This was a reaction to the punishment meted out to the students of Rangpur. Several young people from Calcutta rushed to Rangpur to provide voluntary service as teachers.

9 November 1905: Subodh Chandra Mallik delivered a speech [6, p. 5] on the ground of the Field and Academy Club where he promised support of one lakh rupees for setting up a national university.

11 November 1905: A meeting of about ten thousand young men was held at College Square and was presided over by Ashutosh Chaudhuri. The immediate need for establishing a National University was stated by Satish Chandra Mukherjee, Bipin Chandra Pal, and others.

14 November 1905: Ashutosh Chaudhuri issued a historic manifesto with a call to the leading men of the time to meet on 16 November to discuss the crisis that arose from the students' decision to boycott examinations of the Calcutta University and instead join some national university. Since there was no such university, his call was to immediately take up the issue of forming such a university.

16 November 1905: An Education Conference was held at the Bengal Landholders' Association. Peary Mohan Mukherjee presided over the meeting and attendees included practically all leading personalities of the time including Gurudas Banerjee, Satish Chandra Mukherjee, Ashutosh Chaudhuri, Rash Bihari Ghosh, Rabindranath Tagore, Taraknath Palit, Chittaranjan Das, and many others. The meeting resolved to form a National Council of Education with the goal of providing "literary, scientific and technical education on national lines and under national control." (See [5, p. 37]). Further, the meeting also suggested that the students should not boycott examinations.

10 December 1905: A meeting at the Landholders' Association appointed a Ways and Means Committee to prepare schemes and courses of National Education. This Committee consisted of Rabindranath Tagore, Taraknath Palit, Satish Chandra Mukherjee, and others with Nilratan Sircar as the secretary.

11 March 1906: The report of the Ways and Means Committee was considered at a meeting held at the Landholders' Association. The meeting was presided over by Satyendranath Tagore. The report of the Ways and Means Committee was accepted, and a National Council of Education (NCE) was formed with 92 eminent personalities. The object of the NCE was "to impart Education – Literary as well as Scientific and Technical – on National Lines and exclusively under National Control, *not in opposition to, but standing apart from*, the existing system of Primary, Secondary and University Education." (See [5, p. 44]).

The main person behind the National Education Movement was Satish Chandra Mukherjee as is evidenced from views of various personalities. According to Benoy Kumar Sarkar [9, p. 75]: "From 14 November 1905 (the date of Chowdhury's Manifesto) to 14 August, 1906 (the date of formal inauguration of the Bengal National College) the history of the national education movement is virtually the biography of Satis Mukherjee." Rabindranath Tagore in a speech before the Dawn Society on 25 February 1906 observed that the National Education Movement in Bengal had been inspired by Satish Chandra Mukherjee [5, p. 40]. Further, Mukherjee and

Mukherjee [5, p. 67] quoted from a speech by Aurobindo Ghosh on 19 January 1908 on the contribution of Satish Chandra Mukherjee to the National Education Movement: "a man who had given his life to that work, the man who really organised the National College in Calcutta." In his speech [6, p. 29] to the West Bengal Assembly in 1955, Bidhan Chandra Roy stated that "the Council is one of the monuments of constructive achievements of creative urge of the nation for Swadeshi education. Satis Chandra Mukherji and his well-known Dawn Society laid the moral foundation of the Council."

Financial support to the cause of formation of a National University was provided by the following persons.

Subodh Chandra Mallik: Rs. one lakh.

Brajendra Kishore Roy Chowdhury (zamindar of Gouripur): Rs. five lakhs.

Surya Kanta Acharya Chowdhury (Maharaja of Mymensingh): Rs. three lakhs.

4 Setting up of the NCE and the SPTE

The question of what should be the focus of National Education led to a split in opinion among the nationalist leaders. One group comprising of Gurudas Banerjee, Satish Chandra Mukherjee, Hirendranath Datta, Ashutosh Chaudhuri, Subodh Chandra Mallik, Brajendra Kishore Roy Chowdhury and others advocated "three-dimensional system" of education consisting of literary, scientific, and technical education.

Another group consisting of Taraknath Palit, Bhupendra Nath Bose, Nagendranath Ghosh, Nilratan Sircar, Manindra Chandra Nandy and others wished to focus only on technical education. Taraknath Palit, who had been intimately involved with the proposed National Education Council, both as a member of the Education Committee (formed on 16 November 1905) and the Ways and Means Committee (formed on 10 December 1905), declined to agree to the "three-dimensional" formulation in the 11 March meeting. As a result, he was not included in the list of 92 members of the National Council of Education.

Taraknath Palit undertook the formation of an organisation for promoting purely technical education. This organisation came to be called the Society for the Promotion of Technical Education (SPTE).

1 June 1906: Official registration of the National Council of Education.

1 June 1906: Official registration of the Society for the Promotion of Technical Education (SPTE).

Note that the NCE and SPTE had different, but overlapping goals. While the goal of the NCE was to impart education in all of the three branches – literary, scientific, and technical – the goal of the SPTE was to focus solely on technical education. The two organisations, though separate, had common members. Importantly, *Rash Bihari Ghosh was the president of both the NCE and the SPTE.*

1906-1921: Rash Bihari Ghosh was the President of the NCE [9, p. 329]. He was also the President of SPTE [5, p. 48]. From the very beginning, Rash Bihari Ghosh was involved with both the NCE and the SPTE until he passed away in 1921. On his passing away, he bequeathed an enormous sum of money to the NCE which at that time was running only

the Bengal Technical Institute.

Subsequent to the registration of the NCE and the SPTE, two separate educational institutes were formed.

25 July 1906: The Bengal Technical Institute started functioning under the aegis of SPTE. The vision of SPTE in general and the goal of the Bengal Technical Institute in particular was to provide technical education so as to enable Indians to participate in the "the great industrial awakening" of the country (see [9, p. 91]). Pramatha Nath Bose (a pioneering geologist and paleontologist) was the first principal of the Bengal Technical Institute for the period 1906-1908.

14 August 1906: A meeting of the NCE was held at the Calcutta Town Hall which was presided over by Rash Bihari Ghosh. A motivating speech [6, p. 9] was delivered by Rabindranath Tagore. The Bengal National College was formally inaugurated.

15 August 1906: The Bengal National College and School started functioning under the aegis of NCE with Aurobindo Ghosh as the first principal, and Satish Chandra Mukherjee as the first executive head or superintendent.

In the next few years, the ideological principle behind the NCE was incorporated into the broader nationalist programme.

December 1906: At the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress, Hirendranath Datta moved a resolution in favour of National Education which was officially accepted as an integral part of the programme.

February 1908: The Bengal Provincial Conference held at Pabna under the chairmanship of Rabindranath Tagore gave a further impetus to the NCE by adopting a resolution moved by Aurobindo Ghosh.

5 Aurobindo Ghosh's Involvement with the Bengal National College

The period of intense activity of the National Education Movement was in late October to mid December 1905. During this period, Aurobindo Ghosh was in Baroda. He reached Calcutta on 11 March 1906 to attend the meeting of the formation of the National Council of Education, and became an important member of the NCE. Subsequent major points of the involvement of Aurobindo Ghosh in the National Education Movement are summarised below.

15 August 1906: Aurobindo Ghosh was the first principal of the Bengal National College.

2 August 1907: He resigned due to the possibility of prosecution under the Bande Mataram sedition case; Satish Chandra Mukherjee succeeded him as the principal.

16 August 1907: He was arrested and released on bail the following day.

23 September 1907: Aurobindo Ghosh was acquitted in the Bande Mataram sedition case and rejoined the Bengal National College as a Professor.

February 1908: He moved the resolution in support of the NCE at the Bengal Provincial Conference.

2 May 1908: Aurobindo Ghosh was arrested in the Alipore Bomb Case; while in prison, he submitted his final resignation from the Bengal National College.

Aurobindo Ghosh was acquitted in the Alipore Bomb Case on 6 May 1909. He did not, however, rejoin the Bengal National College. We note that as per available records, Aurobindo Ghosh was only involved with the Bengal National College and the National Council of Education. In particular, there is no record of his involvement with either the Bengal Technical Institute, or its parent body the Society for the Promotion of Technical Education.

6 Merger of the NCE and the SPTE

In the period 1906 to 1910, both the NCE and the SPTE ran independently. The NCE operated the Bengal National College and various other national schools all over Bengal, while the SPTE operated only the Bengal Technical Institute in Calcutta. The goal of the NCE was to impart three-dimensional education in literary, scientific, and technical branches. The NCE in general and the Bengal National College in particular, however, was not successful in the technical branch. The Executive Committee of the National Council of Education for the period 1906-08 had seventeen members. None of them had "any experience of industry, engineering, commerce or business of any sort" ([9, p. 77]). The shortcomings and irony of the National Council of Education in its promotion of technical education was described by Benoy Kumar Sarkar [9, p. 77]:

> The National Council of Education wanted to function as a full-fledged University and had the ambition of imparting literary, scientific as well as technical education from the lowest (primary) to the post-graduate standard. But not a single engineer, industrialist or business organizer was called upon to function on the Executive Committee of this Council which was established as a protest against the over-literary, all-too academic, unscientific and un-industrial University of Calcutta.

As a result, Benoy Kumar Sarkar [9, p. 84] noted: "The technological and engineering departments had hardly been started in 1908 ... Some forty persons were on the teaching staff but not more than three belonged to the technical department."

While both the NCE and the SPTE were formed on nationalistic ideals, there was a difference of opinion on how to achieve the ultimate goal of national education under national control. Benoy Kumar Sarkar remarks [9, pp. 97-98]: "the slogan, Bengal National College vs. Bengal Technical Institute, served to furnish the raison d'être of the tug of war in the nationalist world of Bengal for over four years from November 1905 to May 1910." In May 1910, the tug-of-war came to a close with the amalgamation of the SPTE into the NCE. Quoting from the Annual Report of the NCE for 1909-10 (p. 2), Benoy Kumar Sarkar [9, p. 98] mentions the condition of the merger to be the following.

> The Council shall establish and maintain a Central Educational Institution for imparting general and technical education in all its phases according to the scheme of studies approved by the Council. The arts and pure science side of the institution shall be called the Bengal National College and the applied science side of this Institution shall be called the Bengal Technical Institute. The internal management of the Bengal National College and the Bengal Technical Institute shall be vested in two separate Managing Committees.

25 May 1910: The SPTE was absorbed into the NCE. Subsequently, both the Bengal National College and the Bengal Technical Institute operated under the aegis of the NCE.

Subsequent to the merger, in the next decade, it turned out that the Bengal Technical Institute was favoured by the students, while the Bengal National College failed to attract students. According to Benoy Kumar Sarkar [9, p. 99]: "For in the course of a few years, be it said at once, Bengal National College found itself with empty benches and automatically ceased to exist. By 1916-17 not a student cared to come for a literary and scientific instruction along national lines. The institution that endured and survived is the institution of alleged literary materialism, or bread-and-butter (*dal-bhat*) philosophy, Bengal Technical Institute."

7 Subsequent Developments Leading to the Formation of Jadavpur University

Due to the lack of students, the Bengal National College was forced to shut down. There are two records of this event, which differ by a few years indicating that the official closure came a few years after the Bengal National College ceased to function due to lack of students.

1916-1917: "Bengal National College ceases to function for want of students. Bengal Technical Institute goes on." (See [9, p. 48]).

1920: The Bengal National College was closed down [6, p. 30].

The next major event in the historical evolution was the passing away of Rash Bihari Ghosh. He was the founding principal of the NCE and provided supervisory guidance in the formative years and in the subsequent decade. Subsequently Ashutosh Chaudhuri was the president for a few years.

1921: Rash Bihari Ghosh passed away. He made an enormous bequest to NCE, amounting to Rs. thirteen lakhs [6, p. 31]. This was important in the further development of the Bengal Technical Institute, which at that point of time was the only institute being administered by the NCE.

1921-1924: Ashutosh Chaudhuri was the President of the NCE [9, p. 329].

The year 1924 marks the important event of the shifting of the Bengal Technical Institute to Jadavpur. Due to its location at Jadavpur, the institute in time evolved to become Jadavpur University.

June 1924: "The College is housed in its own lands and buildings at Jadavpur." (See [9, p. 50]).

The next two events that we list were important for international recognition.

1924-1944: Prafulla Chandra Ray was the President of the NCE [9, p. 329]. He was an eminent scientist of international stature, and had strong nationalistic bearings. His involvement with NCE brought significant international scientific recognition to NCE. Prafulla Chandra Ray had earlier been involved with the Bengal Technical Institute in various capacities. He was a member of the Advisory Board of Experts in 1906 [9, p. 87], the Chairman of the Syllabus Revision Committee, and paper-setter and examiner of Chemistry [3]. He was also the longest serving president of the NCE.

1924: "The University of Edinburgh grants recognition to Jadavpur College as satisfying the requirements for admission to the Scottish University for the purpose of graduation in

engineering and mining." (See [9, p. 50]).

The next major event was the change of name of the Bengal Technical Institute.

May 1929: "New name adopted for Bengal Technical Institute: College of Engineering and Technology, Bengal." (See [9, p. 52]).

After the passing away of Prafulla Chandra Ray, the next president of the NCE was Bidhan Chandra Roy. It was he who ultimately guided the College of Engineering and Technology into Jadavpur University.

1944-1962: Bidhan Chandra Roy was the President of the NCE [9, p. 329].

16 September 1955: Bidhan Chandra Roy introduced the Bill for the creation of Jadavpur University to the West Bengal Assembly. At that time, he was both the Chief Minister of West Bengal and the President of the NCE.

24 December 1955: Jadavpur University was founded. In particular, the College of Engineering and Technology was converted to Jadavpur University. At the same time, the two branches of humanities and sciences were started afresh as part of the overall scope of the university.

8 Resolution of the Lineage Question

Before we get into a discussion of the lineage of Jadavpur University, we provide extracts from Bidhan Chandra Roy's speech to the West Bengal Assembly. He specifically mentions the importance of the financial contributions made by Subodh Chandra Mallik, Brajendra Kishore Roy Chowdhury, Surya Kanta Acharya Chowdhury and Rash Bihari Ghosh [6, pp. 29-31] in the formative and subsequent stages.

Bidhan Chandra Roy specifically acknowledges the contribution of Satish Chandra Mukherjee and the Dawn Society and further goes on to mention [6, p. 30] the contributions of other persons to the NCE:

> Other notable persons like Aurobindo Ghosh, Rabindranath Tagore, Rashbehary Ghose, Satis Chandra Mukherji, Prafulla Chandra Ray, Gooroodas Banerjee, Asutosh Chaudhuri, Cittaranjan Das, Hirendranath Dutt, Benoykumar Sarkar, Devaprasad Sarvadhikary, Ramendrasundar Trivedi and others also became closely associated with this National Institution, either as teachers or paper-setters or counsellors. The selfless services rendered by these distinguished sons of Bengal made the establishment and development of the Council possible.

On the institutional lineage, Bidhan Chandra Roy notes [6, pp. 30-32]:

> In 1920, the National College was closed down; the School of Technology, however, continued to develop. For the last thirty years the Council has directed its main attention and employed all its resources to technical education, but humanistic studies are still included as parts of the engineering and technical courses of study.
>
> ...
>
> The College of Engineering and Technology has been virtually functioning as a university. The reason for bringing this Bill before the House is to enable those who

have graduated from this institution to obtain recognition which only a university can give.

A summary of the relevant points of the timeline is shown in Figure 1. We use the following abbreviations in Figure 1 and Table 1.

NEM : National Education Movement.

NCE : National Council of Education.

BNC : Bengal National College.

SPTE : Society for the Promotion of Technical Education.

BTI : Bengal Technical Institute.

Based on the material that we have developed so far, we now turn to the lineage aspect of the question that we formulated at the beginning.

What is the true lineage of Jadavpur University?

The Bengal National College started in 1906 with an ambitious programme which included primary, secondary and collegiate sections, with the collegiate section consisting of a four-year course (see [5, p. 50]). On the other hand, the Bengal Technical Institute started in 1906 with a more modest programme consisting of intermediate and secondary sections, while the collegiate section was "considered beyond its means." (See [9, p. 92]).

The subsequent developments of the two institutes ran in two opposite directions. As noted above, the Bengal National College functionally ceased to operate around 1916-17 and closed down in 1920. The Bengal Technical Institute, on the other hand, went from strength to strength. In 1911, the City and Guilds of London Institute Examination permitted students of the secondary department to "compete for the higher grade examination without going through the lower grades." (See [9, p. 46]; we note that in 1911, the City and Guilds of London Institute conducted examinations in only technical subjects.) The collegiate programme started sometime in the next decade, and we find evidence that a chemical engineering degree programme was started at the Bengal Technical Institute in 1921 [8, p. 11]. In 1923, the City and Guilds of London Institute Examination permitted "students of Bengal Technical Institute to enter for the Grade II examination in both electrical and mechanical engineering without having to pass the Grade I examination." (See [9, p. 50].) In the following year, i.e. in 1924, the University of Edinburgh formally recognised the degree of the Bengal Technical Institute [9, p. 50].

When Jadavpur University was formed from the College of Engineering and Technology in 1955, the new branches of humanities and sciences were created. So in a sense, the educational initiative circled back to the original principle of three-dimensional education of the National Council of Education. As a move towards a university, it was natural to develop a fuller curriculum than just engineering and technology. So Jadavpur University was indeed justified in creating the new streams of humanities and sciences.

This does not, however, justify considering Jadavpur University as a continuation of the Bengal National College. For one thing, the Bengal National College died out in 1920, and if it were not for the Bengal Technical Institute, arguably the entire endeavour of national education would have died out with the death of the Bengal National College.

There is another fundamental difference. As noted earlier, in the years 1906-10, the Bengal National College was unable to get its act together with respect to technical education. So while

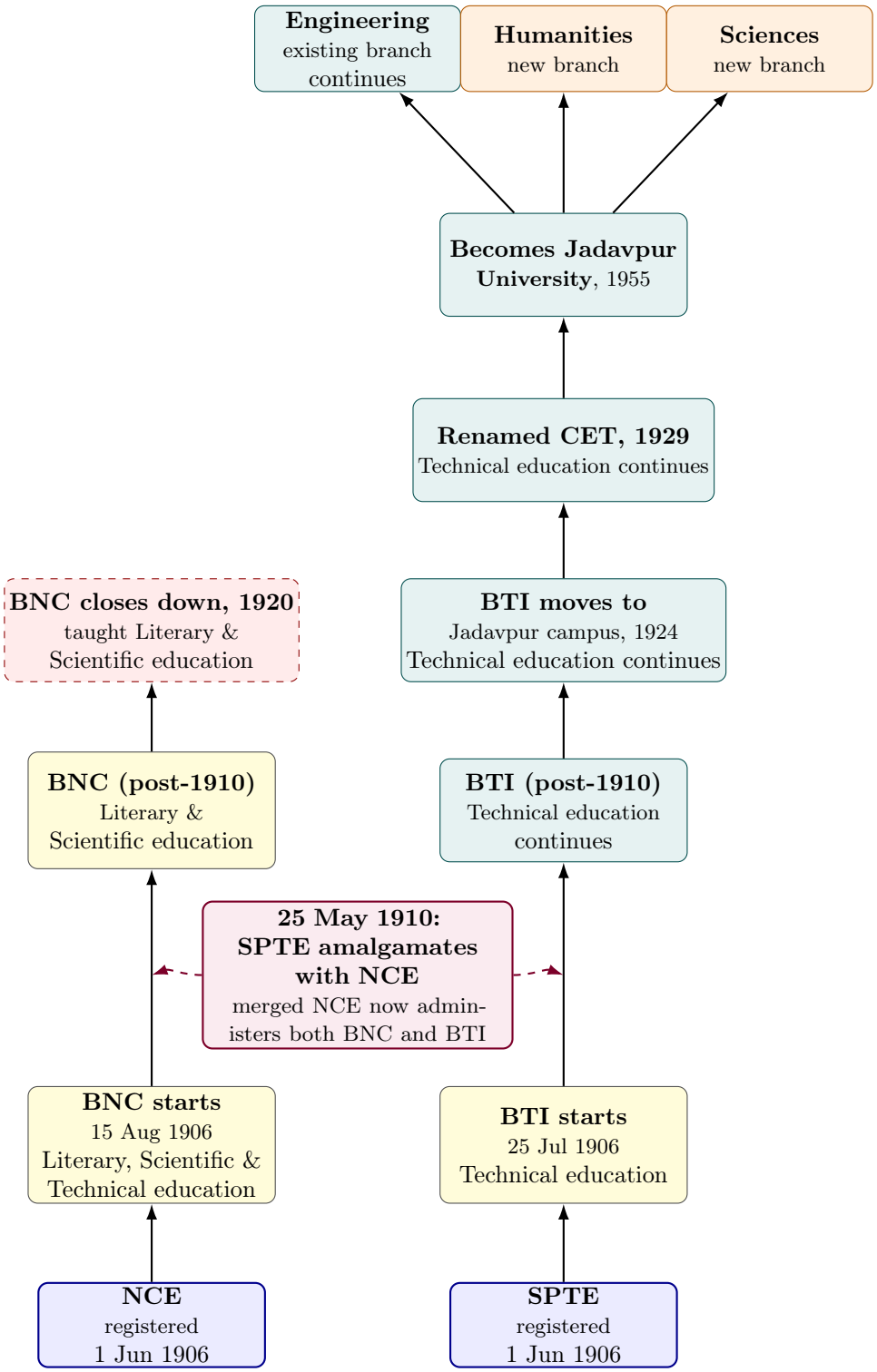


Figure 1: Institutional development from the National Council of Education and the Society for the Promotion of Technical Education to Jadavpur University.

in principle, it wished to pursue three-dimensional education, it could only focus on literary and scientific education. Jadavpur University, in contrast, evolved out of the Bengal Technical Institute via the College of Engineering and Technology, i.e. it evolved out of a technical education programme and then started the humanities and sciences branches anew. The emphasis on technical education marks a foundational difference between the erstwhile Bengal National College and Jadavpur University.

An argument can be made that since Jadavpur University was formed out of the NCE, the true lineage of Jadavpur University should be seen as continuous mentoring by NCE from 1906 onwards. We consider this argument in more detail. In 1910, the SPTE was amalgamated into the NCE. In the period 1906-10, on its own the NCE was not successful with the technical education programme. It is after the merger with SPTE that it became successful in this segment. So after the merger, while the name NCE was retained, and in principle the three-dimensional education concept also remained, within a few years there was no independent branch of humanities (or sciences), and humanities subjects were "included as parts of the engineering and technical courses of study" (see the above quote from the speech of Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy). So in practice, a few years after the 1910 merger, the NCE operated essentially as the SPTE for more than three decades. This makes it difficult to trace the lineage of Jadavpur University back to the NCE of 1906.

Lastly, we consider the issue of ideological lineage. In 1906, both NCE and SPTE grew out of the common ideology of providing national education under national control. Post independence, the specific anti-colonial motivation of 'education under national control' became moot. As for the other strands of the national-education ideology of 1906, the historical evidence does not support tracing any distinctive trait of Jadavpur University to them. For example, with respect to Calcutta University, Benoy Kumar Sarkar noted in 1946 [9, p. 99]:

> during the last quarter of a century, thanks to the constructive patriotism, painstaking statesmanship and patient idealism of Ashutosh Mukerjee (c. 1914-25) Calcutta University has virtually grown into whatever the N. C. E. wanted to be between 1905 and 1910.

This suggests a general diffusion of the broader aspirations of the national-education ideology into Indian higher education institutions, rather than being carried forward uniquely by any single successor institution.

To summarise, one may consider three types of lineage, namely institutional lineage, educational lineage, and the ideological lineage of national education under national control. As argued above and summarised in Figure 1, the institutional and educational lineages of Jadavpur University clearly start with the Bengal Technical Institute rather than the Bengal National College. As for the lineage of the more abstract ideology of national education under national control, post-independence the anti-colonial strand of the ideological issue simply became moot, while the historical evidence does not support tracing any distinctive feature of Jadavpur University to the remaining strands.

9 Resolution of the Founder Question

We now revisit the founder aspect of the main question.

Was Jadavpur University founded by a single person?

There are a number of persons who contributed to the process which led to the formation of Jadavpur University. Our narrative identifies many such individuals, though the list should not be taken as the complete list of all individuals who contributed to the process. Bidhan Chandra Roy's speech also identifies a set of people. For the sake of answering the above question, we consider in some details the personalities who arguably are the more plausible candidates to consider for the role of being the single founder of Jadavpur University.

Instead of Jadavpur University, if we consider the National Education Movement, then we have a clear answer. Satish Chandra Mukherjee was the main spirit behind the National Education Movement. His efforts led to the formation of the National Council of Education, and subsequently the establishment of the Bengal National College.

Coming back to the question of Jadavpur University, we find that due to the difference of opinion with the founders of the NCE, Taraknath Palit and others formed the SPTE which established the Bengal Technical Institute. After the absorption of SPTE into the NCE, for about a decade or so both the Bengal National College and the Bengal Technical Institute functioned under the NCE. In 1920, the Bengal National College closed down, and it is the Bengal Technical Institute which continued and ultimately became Jadavpur University.

The books by Benoy Kumar Sarkar [9] and Haridas Mukherjee and Uma Mukherjee [5] provide no evidence that Satish Chandra Mukherjee played any role in the setting up and the operation of the Bengal Technical Institute. The lack of evidence from Benoy Kumar Sarkar [9] is particularly relevant since he was a faculty member of the Bengal National College and was earlier a part of the Dawn Society which was formed by Satish Chandra Mukherjee. Satish Chandra Mukherjee's association was only with the Bengal National College and the parent body the NCE. From the description provided by Benoy Kumar Sarkar [9, pp. 94-99], the Bengal National College and the Bengal Technical Institute were ideologically opposed on how to achieve the goal of national education. Further, as mentioned above, the Bengal National College had minimal programme for technical education. Since rather than the Bengal National College, it is the Bengal Technical Institute which continued the journey into the future to become Jadavpur University, it becomes difficult to identify Satish Chandra Mukherjee as the main contributor to the process which ultimately resulted in Jadavpur University. This is not to undermine the nationalistic spirit and the zeal with which Satish Chandra Mukherjee contributed to the National Education Movement in general, and the National Council of Education and the Bengal National College in particular. While some of this inspiration no doubt continued in later years, history tells us that it is the national education branch with the more modest goal – constituting the SPTE and the Bengal Technical Institute – of providing technical education that endured the whims of history. So while Satish Chandra Mukherjee was indeed the main person behind the National Education Movement, the subsequent institutional development does not show that he can be considered to be the founder of Jadavpur University.

Another candidate who may be considered as a possible founder is undoubtedly Rash Bihari

Ghosh. He was the president of the NCE and the SPTE. From 1906 to 1910 he was the president of both the organisations, and after the merger he was the president of NCE from 1910 to 1921 until he passed away. Further, he bequeathed an enormous amount of money to the NCE in 1921 which helped in further development. Note that in 1921 the NCE was operating only the Bengal Technical Institute. So the bequest of Rash Bihari Ghosh was certainly an early major financial contribution to the growth of Jadavpur University. From this it is clear that in both in the formative years and later, Rash Bihari Ghosh played an important role.

On the other hand, the prime mover behind the SPTE which set up the Bengal Technical Institute was Taraknath Palit. Identifying Rash Bihari Ghosh as the focal person behind the formation of Jadavpur University would risk understating the contribution of Taraknath Palit, who in 1906 showed the vision to found a technical institute in the face of opposition from the main branch of nationalistic thought which favoured "three-dimensional" education. Though in the 1906-1910 phase, Taraknath Palit's idea of forming a technical institute gained less traction than the idea of the "three-dimensional" education, history shows that ultimately it was his vision that endured and led to the formation of Jadavpur University.

So can we instead identify Taraknath Palit as the key person behind establishing Jadavpur University? He was undoubtedly a visionary. In the face of majority opinion, he founded the SPTE which fostered the Bengal Technical Institute that later developed into Jadavpur University. On the other hand, apart from the initial vision and funding, possibly due to advanced age (he was 75 in 1906[1]), he was not directly involved in the further evolution of the institutions. As a result, it becomes difficult to consider Taraknath Palit as the single founder. We take this opportunity to note that it is the combined vision and effort of the two esteemed legal personalities, Taraknath Palit and Rash Bihari Ghosh, that gave birth to a major development of engineering education in Bengal which finally resulted in Jadavpur University.

Next we consider Aurobindo Ghosh. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Aurobindo Ghosh was one of the rousing leaders of nationalism and patriotism. Here we focus on the more specific issue of his role in the foundational process of the ultimate formation of Jadavpur University. As noted above, in the period October-November 1905 to prior to 11 March 1906, Aurobindo Ghosh was not in Calcutta and hence could not take part in the National Education Movement that evolved quickly in Calcutta. In particular, he was not a member of the Ways and Means Committee which formulated the broad principles of national education and presented them at the meeting on 11 March 1906. On the other hand, from 11 March 1906, Aurobindo Ghosh was an important member of the National Council of Education. Further, he was the first principal of the Bengal National College. In 1907, he delivered a memorable speech to the students of the Bengal National College [6, p. 21]. However, Aurobindo Ghosh was not involved with either the SPTE or the Bengal Technical Institute. Since between the Bengal National College and the Bengal Technical Institute branches of nationalist ideology driven educational endeavours, it is the latter branch that survived and ultimately morphed into Jadavpur University, it is difficult to assign the role of founder of Jadavpur University to Aurobindo Ghosh. We also note that Aurobindo Ghosh was not really convinced about the type of education imparted at the Bengal National College. In 1909 he wrote [2, p. 14]: "the instruction given in the Bengal

[1]See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taraknath_Palit, accessed on 18 September 2026.

National College was only an improved European system, not Indian or National."

If we focus on Bengal Technical Institute, then we may consider Pramatha Nath Bose who was the first principal of the Bengal Technical Institute from 1906-1908. As described above, the lineage of Jadavpur University is from the Bengal Technical Institute and not the Bengal National College, so on that count one may consider Pramatha Nath Bose. On the other hand, in view of the long-standing contribution of Rash Bihari Ghosh and the visionary contribution of Taraknath Palit, it is difficult to decide in favour of Pramatha Nath Bose.

Moving ahead, an important figure in the evolutionary process was Prafulla Chandra Ray. He was the longest serving president of the NCE, and was also earlier associated with the Bengal Technical Institute in various capacities. While his contribution was undoubtedly important, his major contribution came after the Bengal Technical Institute had already gained a certain amount of robust growth.

The final candidate to consider is Bidhan Chandra Roy, who was also a long serving president. As the Chief Minister of West Bengal, he piloted the Bill to create Jadavpur University. If we consider Jadavpur University as it was created in 1955, then clearly Bidhan Chandra Roy should be considered to be the founder. On the other hand, if we wish to trace the lineage back to the early days, then Bidhan Chandra Roy comes too late.

Person	**Why not single founder of the formative process?**
Satish Chandra Mukherjee	the main person behind NEM, important contribution to NCE & BNC; but no contribution to SPTE & BTI.
Rash Bihari Ghosh	President (1906-21) of NCE & SPTE, bequeathed a princely sum to NCE; substantial supportive & supervisory role; but not the visionary behind the NCE or the SPTE.
Taraknath Palit	founder of SPTE, promoted the vision of technical education against majority opinion; but not sufficient direct involvement.
Aurobindo Ghosh	first principal of BNC (1906-07), important contribution to NCE; but no contribution to SPTE & BTI.
Pramatha Nath Bose	first principal of BTI (1906-08); but not sufficient involvement.
Prafulla Chandra Ray	longest serving president (1924-44) of NCE, brought international scientific credibility; but came at a time when the Bengal Technical Institute had already gained some maturity.
Bidhan Chandra Roy	President (1944-62) of NCE, guided the transition to Jadavpur University, and so is indeed the founder of the university created in 1955; but came at a much later period compared to the initial foundational years.

Table 1: A summary of the contributions of the important persons to the institutional process of the formation of Jadavpur University.

The contributions of the various candidates considered above are summarised in Table 1 along with explanations as to why the persons cannot be considered to be the single founder of Jadavpur University. While we have chosen to focus on only a few persons in the table, this does

not lessen the contributions of the various other persons mentioned in the narrative above.

The evidence that we have presented shows that the answer to whether the formative process of Jadavpur University has a single founder is in the negative. A number of brilliant and nationalistically motivated people played stellar roles in the process which ultimately led to the foundation of Jadavpur University. The historical evidence that we have investigated does not provide sufficient basis for identifying one single individual as having made a uniquely decisive contribution to the institutional development that culminated in Jadavpur University.

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