

My Reminiscences

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It is indeed a great pleasure for any person interested in engineering education and industrial development to see an Institution like M.B.M. Engineering College grow to a matured age of 50 years in the service of an industrially backward region of the country. The pleasure is all the more for the son of the soil who had not only a humble role to play in conceiving the very idea but had been instrumental in ensuring its sound birth. While scanning over the performance during the last five decades the mind naturally gets crowded with the happy reminiscences of the initial pangs associated with the growth of the institution which make it embarrassing for one who had the proud privilege of being emotionally involved in the early events to put them on record.

It was on a cool February afternoon of 1949 when a close relation of mine came running to me with the news that the Council of Ministers of the erstwhile Jodhpur State had taken a decision to start an Engineering College at Jodhpur and that I had been charged with the responsibility of being the first Vice-Principal. It came to me as a pleasant surprise. The news was too good to be true as "the person was till then known but in his own place." Though I had earlier been consulted by the then Chief Minister late Shri Jainarain Vyas and the then Education Minister Shri Mathura Das Mathur about the possibility of starting an Engineering College in Jodhpur. I never expected the decision to come so soon. I was at that time working as second in command at the Birla Engineering College, Pilani and had come to Jodhpur on a short leave. Consequential administrative action followed in quick succession and the appointment letter was in my hands within a couple of days. On return to Pilani I obtained release from the Birla Education Trust and joined duty at Jodhpur as the first Officiating Principal of what was then christened as Jodhpur Engineering College, on the 6th of April 1949.

Lot of changes in the political and administrative set up had in the meantime taken place as a result of the merger of the former Jodhpur State with the newly formed State of Rajasthan. ICS Administrator had replaced the Council of Ministers. The project initiated by the erstwhile State were subjected to a process of reexamination. The Officiating Principal housed in a large and beautifully furnished bungalow was all that the College could claim to have at that time. Although detailed estimates and programmes for the College were prepared by me and submitted to the Administrator, yet the whole situation was clouded with a sense of uncertainty. The Administrator as such rightly thought that instead of trying to waste my experience and knowledge on a doubtful project it could be better utilized on some other development work. Consequently I was given the charge of an Executive Engineer in the Electricity Department to look after telephones and electric meter sections. Soon it was abundantly clear that there was no possibility of the College coming into being in the near future. Interested people outside the State also came to know about the situation. As a result thereof while on the one hand Birla Education Trust made efforts to get me back at Pilani, it was the ministry of Rehabilitation, Govt. of India who succeeded in other economic activities in the rehabilitation colonies being set up by the Govt. of India for the emigrants from West Pakistan and East Bengal at Nilokheri and Fulia in Punjab and West Bengal respectively. On instruction from Rajasthan Government I joined the

Ministry of Rehabilitation at New Delhi on 12th August 1949 and continued work there for 22 months.

It was early in June, 1951 that while sitting in a thatched hut in a rehabilitation colony in Nadia district of West Bengal that I got a call from the Govt. of India to say that my services are required back by the State of Rajasthan for starting the Engineering College and That I was to move immediately to Jodhpur. It took me a few days to hand over my charge at Fulia. By the time I reached Jaipur it was 19th June '51. In the meantime the State had already taken decision to go ahead with the implementation of the original scheme for starting the engineering college with an initial contribution made by the benevolent family of Shri Mugneeram Bangur. The State Minister for Education Shri Mathura Das Mathur with his usual dynamism ably supported by Shri Jagan Nath Purohit as Secretary for Education was particular that the College be started from the next academic session and promised adequate administrative and financial support. It was a stupendous task, It was already late in June and to start the college in July was almost impossible, as everything had to be started from scratch. There was no place to sit or a paper to write on. All that I had was faith and determination.

The first action was to obtain the service of Shri Badridas Purohit, who was then working as Dy. Inspector of Schools, on loan from Education Department. The Office of the College had to be set up in my ancestral home in the city as the bungalow I had occupied in 1949 had by that time been allotted to somebody else during my absence from Jodhpur. It was a pot of luck that we could find a building, the Ugamji's Bungalow to house the College initially. The building lying between the railway overhead bridge and Jodhpur powerhouse had at one time accommodated the first high school in Jodhpur and was then occupied by the Educational Department. Preliminary arrangements for starting the college were taken in hand in right earnest which included getting the building vacated, suitably renovated and furnished for conducting theory and practical classes, applications from students obtained and their selection undertaken strictly on the basis of merit. I can vividly recall working till late hours on the roof of my ancestral home to attend to correspondence, prepare extensive statements for getting Government sanctions, etc. with the help of Shri Badridas and Shri Poosaram Purohit who had joined the College by then as an assistant. It was a matter of great satisfaction and pride for the State and especially for us when we could finally succeed in starting the College in a record period of less than two months on the Independence day, the 15th August 1951 with 35 students in the degree and almost the same number of diploma in Civil Engineering. This was made possible by the active support and assistance from all the departments of the State both at Jaipur as also in Jodhpur including the then Commissioner Shri Daulat Singh. The opening ceremony presided over by Shri Mathura Das Mathur, though simple but dignified, was crowded by congratulations and messages of good wishes from all corners.

The College was more or less a single man's show at that time. I was the only person not only to look after the teaching work but to conduct morning prayers and evening parades as also to attend to correspondence and other work relating to the development of the Institution. From the first day the college programme started with a regular congregational prayer followed by three periods for theory and three to four periods of practical work. There were two classes, one for degree and another for diploma, which had to be managed at the same time. The only way for me to manage them was to see that while one section was in the theory class the other were engaged on practical work in the workshop. In between theory periods I had to rush to the workshop to provide necessary instructions. After a few days of starting the College I was lucky

to persuade one of my old students from Pilani, Shri Neelkant D. Sharma, who at that time was, Head of Department of Chemical Engineering at Chandigarh, and happened to be in Jodhpur, to give his voluntary services by assisting me to conduct the practical classes. An old student of my Alma Mater, the great BHU, in Shri Basheer Khan who was then the Superintending Engineer in Charge of the powerhouse placed all the resources of the Electrical department at our disposal. It was with this help that we were able to set up Carpentry and Fitting shops in the premises of the powerhouse for use by the students of the College.

The College was started as a residential one and as such hostel facilities had to be provided to the students. This was done by taking a group of buildings near Ratanada which at one time housed horses and riders of what was then called the Jodha Squadron. The old stables were suitably modified. The students though housed comfortably had to ride over untrodden path. After taking six hours of teaching and practical work the formal day from the very beginning came to an end with a parade in the form of an informal university Training Corps. It is only after that I could attend to administrative work which kept us engaged nearly till mid-night. Difficulties arose only on days when personal contacts had to be established with other Government Departments which followed the normal working hours or money had to be drawn from the Treasury.

It is a part of human nature to conceive and/or to give birth. There is nothing much to be proud of for any person to have done so successfully. The labor pains may be different but the process follows the natural course of events. The individual concerned only becomes instrumental in the act. Yet once a baby is born it requires experienced hands to ensure its healthy development. After all I was a novice at the game as it was my first delivery. At Pilani I had assisted the process more as a nurse. The newly born College at Jodhpur was lucky in having the services of an experienced professor in Shri V.G. Garde who took over its Principalship sometime towards the end of 1951. With the senior colleague presiding over the destiny of the College, I could thereafter devote more time towards academic work as also to obtain necessary machinery, equipment, etc., for the workshop and the laboratories.

As visualized earlier it was soon quite evident that Ugamiji's Bungalow was neither adequate nor a proper place where the Engineering College could continue to function. An official visit of the then Chief Minister Shri Jai Narain Vyas was taken advantage of in impressing upon him the need for a change. Shri Vyas with his usual foresightedness readily agreed to our contention and invited suggestions for an alternative site. Since we had already by that time investigated the various possibilities, the place where the college is now located was offered as one of the suggestions. The Chief Minister immediately went to inspect this site. The original small building in the premises was then occupied by the Indian Air Force. Telephonic contact was then and there established with Delhi and a formal request from the State Government to the Air Force authorities followed thereafter. On arriving at an agreement with the Government of India arrangements were made to shift the College to its present premises.

In this connection it would be of interest to recall a phenomenon the reasons for which are difficult to explain. While making official allocation of different rooms in Ugamji's Bungalow, I had earmarked a room which was logically the most suitable one for the Principal. Shri Badridas who had some knowledge about the history of the room objected to it vehemently. His contention was that the person who occupied that room had to leave the place within a few months and that he would not like this to be the case with me. The room could not be left

unoccupied for fear of this change. On the opening day of the college a Yagna was performed in the room and the entire office staff was accommodated therein. True to his words, Badridas established his contention when within a period of less than six months the entire staff occupying the room had to vacate when arrangements for changing premises itself of the College had to be made.

It is easy to establish traditions from the very beginning which go a long way in projecting a desirable image for any institution. Great care was taken right from the first day to ensure strict discipline and punctuality both among the students and the staff. A day prior to the opening of the College, some of the candidates, who for personal interview had come late-incidentally due to heavy rainfall, had to suffer the consequence. Admissions were made strictly on merit. Recommendations from various quarters were accommodated only where the candidates otherwise fitted in the merit list. Marks that formed the criteria for admission were published. As a result thereof an anonymous intimation was received after a few months that a student had been admitted on the basis of false marks list including certificates submitted by him. Confidential enquires established the truth of the complaint. Just towards the close of the first session the boy had to be rusticated. Though the students had to undergo very hard work throughout the year there was a good rapport and understanding between the staff and the students. All the students without any exception appreciated the action taken by the College in penalizing the student concerned.

As could be expected the students coming from different places were all full of energy, young blood and charged with emotional expectation for future. They could not be otherwise. The boys brought their own intermediate college experience and aspirations with them. Though kept fully occupied, the College could not continue to function as an isolated island in the academic world. The usual incidents took their turn. There was a reluctance exhibited by the students for taking periodical examination followed by a strike. Resentments were expressed on the quality of food served in the hostel. Yet there was not a single incident that I can recall where the students did not appreciate the sympathetic attitude of the authorities and acted in a disciplined manner.

Notwithstanding the inadequacy of staff and equipment the academic achievements of the students and their high sense of discipline was quite noticeable and very well appreciated by a team of senior professors that had come during the first academic session for inspection on behalf of the Institution of Engineers for giving provisional recognition to the College.

The trust imposed by the public, the Government and the academic bodies in the ability of the College was amply borne out by the quality of the engineers turned out by the College and their subsequent performance in the field. It is a matter of great privilege and pride to see some of the students of the initial batches occupying very high positions in both public and private organizations. The credit for the same goes much more to those who provided proper and regular nourishment to the College rather than those that were merely instrumental in laying a solid foundation.

Pleasures of rocking the cradle fall in the realm of subjective experience. They cannot be circumscribed within the orbit of expressions. So is the case with parting which is painful. Yet change is the order of the day. My short-lived day-to-day association with the college came to an end on urgent summons from Rashtrapati Bhawan. Personal pleasures and aspirations had to be subordinated to the national interest. My only consolation was that the physical separation did

not cause a sudden break. The situation was elastic enough to taper it as I was required to carry the camp office of Vice- Principal with me to Rashtrapati Bhawan from where I continued to handle the work connected with the procurement of machinery and equipment for the college for a number of months thereafter. This enabled me to visit Jodhpur officially more frequently than would have been possible otherwise.

The love and affection exhibited by the staff and the students at the time when I left the College on 2nd April, 1952 after conducting the practical examination at the close of the first session from the Government of India to take up the post of Chief Planning Officer for Community Development in the Planning Commission was something which I could never forget and would always cherish in my memory.

Professor A.D. Bohra was the first acting Principal of M.B.M. Engineering College. This article is a reproduction of a memoir, with suitable modifications, taken from the Souvenir published on the occasion of the silver jubilee celebration in 1976.