

## **PROF. LALIT KUMAR BANERJEE \***

### **Scholar, Critic and Educationist passes away**

Yesterday (29th November) saw the passing away at the age of 62 of Prof. Lalit Kumar Banerjee, the great scholar, literateur, and educationist of Bengal. Well-versed both in English and Bengali literature, he was known pre-eminently as one of the greatest Shakespearian scholars of the day. His penetrating researches into and high critical appreciation of the writings of Bankim Chandra, and above all, his unrivalled humorous writings in the domain of Bengali literature, have earned for him an undying fame. He was the author of several well-known Bengali books, such as "Foara," "Paglajhora" and his numerous contributions to the leading magazines of the day and literary criticisms of various kinds have immensely added to the glory of Bengali literature. He was elected President of the Bengal Literary Conference held at Midnapore in 1922. He was a link between the old and the new in every sense of the word and the void caused by his death it will be very difficult to fill up in the literary world. Having solely dedicated himself to the cause of education, he had been a Professor for the last 40 years of his life and died in harness as the senior Professor of English literature in Bangabasi College, Calcutta, after a devoted service of over 32 years in that College alone.

### **Early life and Academic career**

Prof. Lalit Kumar was born in 1275 B. S. at the house of his maternal grand-father of Santipore in Nadia ; but his father, late Babu Nabin Chandra Banerjee, lived at village Kanchcooli near Muragacha in the same district. His maternal uncle, late Babu Hari Prosanna Mukerjee, was the

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*Editor, Bangabasi College Magazine.*

Principal of T. N. J. College, Bhagalpore and his father was the Head master of an M. E. School at Nilphamari (Rungpore) from which the boy Lalit Kumar passed the M. E. Examination and secured a Scholarship. This was the beginning of a bright career which was uniformly successful throughout his life. In 1882 he passed the Entrance Examination from Krishnagar Collegiate School with a scholarship of Rs. 10 and in 1885 passed the F. A. Examination from Krishnagar College standing first in the University. Besides a senior scholarship to which his high success entitled him, he secured the Duff Scholarship and Pachete Prize of the year. In 1887 he took his B. A. degree from the Metropolitan College with first class Honours both in English and Sanskrit. His first place in the aggregate secured him the much-coveted Ishan Scholarship this time. Finally in 1888, he passed the M. A. Examination from the Presidency College, Calcutta, and occupied the first place in Class I.

### **Long Career as a Teacher**

• Prof. Lalit Kumar had not to wait long for any service. In 1889 he was appointed professor of English in the then Raj Chandra College at Barisal. The next year he joined the T. N. J. College at Bhagalpore. But here also he did not stick long. In 1890 he joined the Berhampore College and remained there for 3 years. His next service was at Coochbehar College for one year only in 1893-94. In 1894, he came to Calcutta and joined the Ripon College. During the period 1897-1902, he was a professor simultaneously both in the Metropolitan and Bangabasi College. In 1902, he became a whole time Professor in Bangabasi College and there he died in harness, a true and trusted member of the College.

### **Courage and Sense of Justice**

The illustrious deceased was held in high esteem by students and teachers alike, not only for his vast erudition -2

but also for his great moral courage and stern sense of justice. He possessed charming powers of conversation and whenever he began to talk the people heard him with pleasure and attention. His criticism of men and manners was unerring and he never hesitated in calling a spade a spade. This led him often to utter many unpleasant truths for which some people took him for a severe man. But those who knew him well, will gladly bear testimony to the fact that his was a genuine heart of gold. There never was a greater friend of the staff and the College than Prof. Banerjee and his high sense of duty never made him absent for a single day from the College unless for very unavoidable reasons. He belonged to the old type of Hindus, but always kept pace with the times and had sympathies with all progressive ideas, whether in politics or society.

### **Domestic Misfortune**

He was a very affectionate father and loving husband, but the death of his eldest son in 1910, who passed the M. A. Examination and was then recently married, gave him a rude shock. In 1922 his youngest son, who had just competed in the I. A. Examination and secured a high place in the University, died, and this bereavement completely shattered his health. His latest book "Sahara," a pen-picture of his life and experiences, gives a pathetic account of his state of mind then. To crown all, his daughter died in 1926 and his wife in May last which might be said to be the last straw that broke the camel's back. A letter written to Prof. S. Roy after that sad event gives out the man in true colours and it runs as follows :—

"From a broad point of view, my wife's sad end must certainly be considered as a blessing—not only a deliverance from her intolerable physical sufferings, but also from the

long-borne sorrows due to terrible bereavements. How tragic matters would have been, had she been the survivor of us two. I must therefore look upon it as a wise dispensation of Providence. Only life turns out to be such a blank after my remarkable long conjugal life extending over half a century almost. However it is part of one's lot and it must be borne in a spirit of resignation. I have the one hope to sustain me—namely, I shall not long outlive her.”

Alas, the premonition has come to be too true ! He died on Friday ( Nov. 29 ) at 6 A M. at his residence at Akhil Mistri Lane after suffering for about a month from Filariasis and other diseases. He leaves behind numerous friends and relatives to mourn his loss, among whom are Babu Salil Kumar Banerjee, his only surviving son and a pleader at Alipore, and Prof. Narendra Nath Mukerjee, his son-in-law.

### FUNERAL PROCESSION

• As soon as the news of his death spread, students and teachers of Bangabasi School and College and the numerous friends of the deceased, among whom were found Principal G. C. Bose, Rai Bahadur Jaladhar Sen, Prof. Profulla Chandra Ghose, went to his residence at Akhil Mistri Lane to pay their last tribute of respect, and the narrow lane was literally packed with people. At 10 o'clock the funeral procession started. The bier, decorated with heaps of flowers and wreaths was taken to the Bangabasi College at Scott Lane and a group photograph taken. On the way many institutions namely Bangabasi College Hostel and Mess, Rajani Gupta Memorial Library, offered their tribute of floral wreaths on the bier. It was a long and large procession of students and the public, the majority of whom walked bare-footed. The procession slowly wended its way through Amherst Street, Mirzapore Street, College Street, Cornwallis Street and Beadon Street.



and at last reached Nimtollah at 12-30 P.M., where the mortal remains of the great Professor were laid on a pyre and sandal wood and soon consumed by the sacred flame.

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## APPRECIATIONS.

By the death of Professor Lalit Kumar Banerjee, Bengal has lost a veteran educationist. Generations of students sat at his feet, and listened with admiration and profit to his unfolding of the beauty of literature and his analysis of the master minds of English, Sanskrit and Bengali literature. But that does not constitute his only title to eminence. He had a passionate love for Bengali literature which has certainly been enriched by his sparkling wit and pathos. His analysis of the female characters of Bankim Chandra is at once brilliant and instructive. With an analytical mind he combined keen power of observation, and obscure traits of human character and commonplace incidents were made vivid by a touch of his magic pen. His almost inexhaustible fund of knowledge extorted unstinted admiration of his students as Professor Lalit Kumar would go on quoting parallel passages from more than one author and in more than one language to create in their minds a real taste for literature and its beauty. He was a nationalist in the best sense of the term, and with his vast erudition combined plain living and high thinking. Bengal is poorer today by his death. We offer our sincere condolence to the bereaved family.

—*Liberty.*

The passing away of Professor Lalit Kumar Banerjee of the Bangabasi College, Calcutta, has removed from Bengal one of the most distinguished educationists of the province. Born in an orthodox Brahmin family of the district of Nadia, he inherited the traditional passion for learning as well as the simplicity of habits and character of an Indian