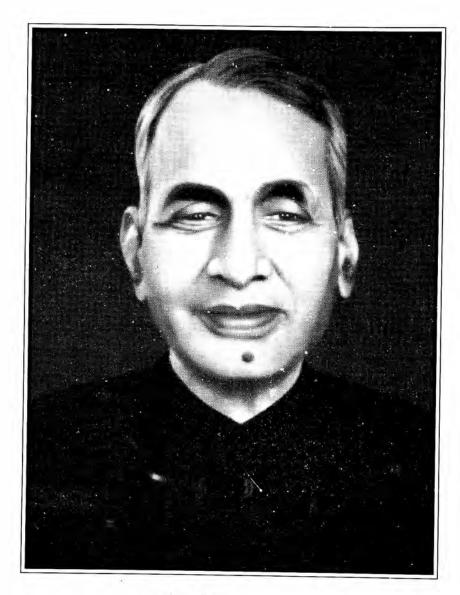
# **BALBHADRA PRASAD**

(26 November 1905 - 12 March 1987)

Biog. Mem. Fell. INSA, New Delhi 34 51-63 (2008)





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# **BALBHADRA PRASAD**

(1906-1987)

(Elected Fellow 1958)

# FAMILY BACKGROUND AND EARLY EDUCATION

**B**ALBHADRA PRASAD passed away on 12th March 1987 after a brief illness in Bhubaneswar, where he was staying with his son Sri SK Prasad. In his sad demise, the country lost a great scientist, an administrator, a philanthropist and a man of rare integrity.

Balbhadra Prasad was born on 26th November 1905 (school record 31.01.1905) in the village Ugna, PO Jagdishpur, Dist. Shahabad (now Bhojpur), Bihar. The village at that time had no post office. He was the second child of his parents. He had three sisters and one brother, who was younger to him. His father, Ram Prakash Lal was a small zamindar. His mother was a generous lady from whom he inherited an unbounded faith in humanistic values and generosity. His father was a brave and wise man. In Prof. Prasad's words, "One memory of my father's bravery, I can never forget in my life. In 1917, my district had a bad communal riot. A Hindu mob, over a thousand, came to our house and wanted my father to lead and loot the Muslims in my village and in neighbouring villages. My father refused in spite of threats from the mob. Our house could have been looted. In spite of this risk, he was firm and the looting in my village and neighbouring villages was avoided." His father could not meet the expenses of college education of both the sons. The younger one stopped his studies after B.Sc. He joined Bihar Agriculture Service and retired as a Class I Officer. A cousin was a lawyer and another, Professor of Economics in Bihar University.

In 1921, he was married to Saraswati Devi, daughter of Sri Ram Prasad, who too was a zamindar. In addition, he was employed in the High Court at Patna. Prof. Prasad's two brother-in-laws were medical doctors, one specializing in Paediatrics and the other in Pathology. Mrs. Prasad and Prof. Prasad brought up Banbihari Das a boy from Cuttack from his childhood as their son, who later worked in Telco. Their only son Sri Krishna Prasad, was in Indian Forest Service, who worked in Orissa during the entire tenure of service.

Prof. Prasad's early education was under a Moulavi for one year (1910-11). Then in 1911, he joined primary classes. After passing lower primary he studied one year at home and then joined Arrah Town school in 1917. When he was in first class, non-cooperation movement started. He got involved in the movement as a result the

passed the Matriculation in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. Then he discontinued studies for one year, taking part in the non-cooperation movement.

In 1922, he joined the I.Sc. Classes in Patna College. He stood first in the first year examination and won Wilson Prize. In 1924, he passed the I.Sc. Examination in the first division. He joined the B.Sc. Classes and passed the B.Sc. (Hons.) in the first class securing record works. He was awarded P.G. scholarship for studying M.Sc. in Chemistry. He joined the M.Sc. Classes. In 1927 he was awarded a State Scholarship. He joined the B.Sc. Classes of the University College of London University. In 1929 he passed the B.Sc. Examination of London University with first class honours in Chemistry.

#### PROFESSIONAL CAREER

In 1929 he joined Ravenshaw College as an Assistant Professor of Chemistry and subsequently Professor of Chemistry and served the department for over two decades. He started research work on viscosity of liquids and solutions of electrolytes and non-electrolytes. In 1943, he was awarded the D.Sc. degree of London University on the basis of the work done in Ravenshaw College. In 1937 two research scholars, AS Chakravarti and MK Srinivasan joined him. AS Chakravarti was the first person to take Ph.D. (Patna University) under his guidance and retired as Director, Sugarcane Research Institute, Pusa, Bihar. MK Srinivasan unfortunately died before he could submit his thesis.

In 1944, Utkal University was established. The PG department of Chemistry was opened in Ravenshaw College in 1947. It was Prof. Prasad, who planned the extension of the existing Chemistry Department so that PG section could be accommodated. In 1947, PG in Chemistry classes were started. A number of his undergraduate students who took their M.Sc. from other universities joined as lecturers. One of the new lecturers, Sukumar Aditya (the author of this memoir) worked under his guidance and was awarded Ph.D degree of the Utkal University in 1951. He retired as Prof. of Physical Chemistry Department of Applied Chemistry, Calcutta University. The same year, under Prof. Prasad's inspiration and guidance of Prof. SS Guhasircar, Prof. MK Rout was awarded Ph.D. degree of the Utkal University. Prof. Rout retired as VC of the Utkal University. The third Ph.D. under Prof. Prasad was PK Jena (retired as Director, RRL, Bhubaneswar). Sisir Coomar Sircar had his Ph.D. under his guidance and served the IIT, Kharagpur as Professor of Metallurgy. Of the number of students who did their M.Sc. thesis work under Professor Prasad, Bimbadhar Nayak and Rabindra Kumar Nanda were outstanding. They subsequently did their doctoral work. Both of them retired as Professors of Chemistry, the former from IIT, Kharagpur and the latter from Utkal University.

In 1952, Professor Prasad became DPI, Orissa and in 1957 he left Orissa to become the Vice Chancellor of Patna University. In October 1961, he became the Vice Chancellor of Allahabad University and retired in 1965.

Then he joined the Chemistry Laboratory of Science College, Patna University, Patna. From 1965 to 1972 he guided research work. CSIR and INSA provided research fellowship. A number of research workers earned their Ph.D's. under his guidance. They are Gangadhar Sahoo, Lakshmi Sharma, Hirendra Kumar Sinha, Bimal Kant Choudhary, Surya Narain Jha, Amar Chandra Jha, Suresh Chandra Lal, Ashok Kumar Jha and Chandrakant Choudhary. Dr. JC Ghosh Reader in Chemistry, joined him and worked in collaboration.

The first scientist who immensely influenced Professor Prasad's life was Professor KS Caldwell, Professor of Chemistry, Patna College. His accuracy in class demonstration experiments were superb. Prof. AS Khan, of the same college, influenced his life by his excellent teaching, integrity and impartiality. He was also influenced by Acharya PC Ray's ideals. In England Prof. FG Donnan created his deep interest in thermodynamics. Prof. Donnan's and Prof. Robinson's excellent teaching and interest in students impressed him much. He always adored the affection of Prof. NR Dhar of Allahabad and Prof. PB Ganguly of Patna University. Prof BC Guha and Prof. BN Ghosh were his life long friends; their friendship started while in the University of London.

# SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS

In early thirties, when Professor Prasad joined Ravenshaw College, the teaching in Chemistry there was upto B.Sc. (Pass) level. Nevertheless there was research activity/tradition in the department. Prof. BK Singh carried out research work in optical rotatory dispersion of camphor's with two assistants, Mr. HB Behera and Mr. I Mohanty.

There was no facilities to pursue any experimental research work in Physical Chemistry. So Professor Prasad started research work with the examination of viscosity data available in the Landolt – Bornstein's Tables. On examination of the viscosity of fused NaNO<sub>3</sub>, KNO<sub>3</sub>, PbCI<sub>2</sub>, PbBr<sub>2</sub>, and K<sub>2</sub>Cr<sub>2</sub>O<sub>7</sub>, he concluded that Andrade – Shepherd's formula  $\log \eta = \alpha + \beta/T$  held for unassociated liquids and for the associated liquids he suggested the equation  $\log \eta = \alpha + \beta/(T-\theta)$ . In a subsequent publication, he examined other equations of viscosity of liquids like Macleod's, Silverman's, Madge's etc. and showed that Andrade's simple equation  $\log \eta = \alpha + \beta/T$  might be considered the best for unassociated liquids. He pointed out the drawbacks in the assumptions in Irany's viscosity equation. Using simple Andrade equation, on the basis that the mechanism of thermal conductance is the same as that of viscosity, he derived a simple expression for viscosity and thermal conductance is liquids and highly compressed gases, given by the equation, K = Cp $\eta$  where K is the

thermal conductance, Cp, sp. heat and  $\eta$  is the viscosity. These researches were published in *Phil Mag* and *Trans. Farad. Soc.* over the period 1930-1948.

In the meantime he worked hard to set-up a laboratory for doing experimental work on measurement of viscosity of solutions and apparent molal volume of solutes. For this purpose he set up precision thermostats and got viscometer and pycnometers fabricated for accurate work. Sri HB Behera who worked with Prof. BK Singh helped a lot in fabrication work. The present memoir writers who were Prof. Prasad's students, had the good fortune of meeting Mr Behera and share his experiences. In thirties and forties with large pycknometers ( $\sim$ 60 ml) and viscometers (flow times greater than 30 min), stop watch with accuracy  $\pm$  0.2 sec, and temperature better than  $\pm$  0.01 he could get density, viscosity coefficient parameters upto 5th decimal place—quite a feat in those days. Viscosities of solutions of a number of weak electrolytes, mono-monovalent and bimonovalent salts were measured at 35° C. The Falkenhegen – Vernon equation was found to apply to them. Apparent molal volumes of simple electrolytes as well as mixtures of electrolytes in aqueous solution were determined and these followed Redlich-Rosenfeld equation  $\phi = \phi_0 + K \vee C$ .

Subsequently he shifted his research interest to the 'Behaviour of Electrolytes in aqueous solutions', when S Aditya, one of his old students joined Ravenshaw College as a lecturer and wanted to work for his Ph.D. in the incomplete dissociation of salts in solutions. The dissociation constants of a number of bi-univalent salts like Pb(NO<sub>3</sub>)<sub>2</sub>, Cd(NO<sub>3</sub>)<sub>2</sub>, Pb(OAc)<sub>2</sub>, Cd(OAc)<sub>2</sub> etc. were determined. While studying these systems anion reversible electrodes, Hg/Hg<sub>2</sub>(OAc)<sub>2</sub>, OAc-; Ag/CNS, CNS electrodes were developed, as the anion sensitive electrode would be more sensitive in assessing the dissociation since, on dissociation, a bi-univalent salt would produce more anions on dissociation Pb(OAc)<sub>2</sub> would produce more acetate ions and as such acetate reversible electrode would be a better sensor.

In the study of dissociation of Cadmium acetate, cells,

 $Cd_x Hg_y \mid Cd(NO_3)_2 \mid \mid salt bridge \mid \mid Cd(OAc)_2 \mid Cdx Hg_y;$ 

HAc

Hg, Hg<sub>2</sub>(OAc)<sub>2</sub> | Cd(OAc)<sub>2</sub> | | Na(OAc) |Hg<sub>2</sub> (OAc)<sub>2</sub>, Hg; HO<sub>2</sub>Ac HOAc

And  $Cd_x Hg_y \mid Cd(OAc)_2 \mid Hg_2 (OAc)_2$ , Hg were used.

**HOAc** 

In the initial stage, salt bridge were used, as also the cells with no liquid junction. Extensive studies of potentials associated with salt bridge with different salts were reported.

Subsequent work in Patna in most of the studies no salt bridge was used. The standard potential and thermodynamic quantities for Hg|Hg<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>, SO<sub>4</sub><sup>2</sup>-, Hg|Hg<sub>2</sub> (OAc)<sub>2</sub>, (OAc)- and Ag|AgCNS, CNS- electrodes were reported. He critically examined Davies equation  $\log \gamma_i = -AZ_i^2[\sqrt{\mu/(1+\sqrt{\mu})}]^{-0.2\mu}$  for the activity coefficient of ions and suggested modification of the equation as  $\log \gamma_i = -AZ_i^2[\sqrt{\mu/(1+\sqrt{\mu})}] - \beta_i\mu$ .

For HC1; 
$$\log \gamma_{h+} \gamma_{ci} = -2[\sqrt{\mu}/(1+\sqrt{\mu})] - (\beta_{H+} + \beta_{ci} -)\mu$$
.

 $\beta_{HC1}(\beta_{H+}+\beta_{c1-})$  was determined using suitable extrapolation.  $\beta$  for an electrolyte Mx was obtained as  $\beta_{Mx} = \beta_{My} + \beta_{Nx} - \beta_{Ny}$ . Using modified Davies equation he and his coworkers in Patna. Science College, Patna, determined the thermodynamic dissociation constants for a number of weak acids like, acetic acid, oxalic acid, succinic acid etc. without assuming a rough value by regression.

Thermodynamic parameters for a number of bi-univalent and bi-bi-valent salts have been reported. With combination of a number of concentration cells the thermodynamic properties of alums were reported.

#### AWARDS AND HONOURS

- Fellow of the Indian National Science Academy 1958.
- Fellow of the National Academy of Sciences, Allahabad 1962.
- President, Institute of Chemists (India) 1974-1975.
- Vice-President, Indian Chemical Society.
- Acharya PC Ray Memorial Medalist, 1967.
- Member, Board of Scientific and Industrial Research, Government of Orissa 1956-1957.
- Tribute to Dr. Balbhadra Prasad, the man and the Scientist by Patna Citizen's forum in his 75th year.

# POSITIONS HELD

- Assistant Professor of Chemistry, Ravenshaw College, Cuttack, September 1929-February 1936.
- Professor of Chemistry, Ravenshaw College, February 1936-September 1952.
   Officiated as Principal for a few months during the period.
- Director of Public Instruction, Orissa September 1952-March 1957. President, Board of Secondary Education for most of the period.
- Dean of Faculty of Science, Utkal University 1946-1957. Member of Senate, Academic Council and Syndicate, Utkal University.
- Vice-Chancellor, Patna University, March 1957 July 1960. Chairman, Bihar School Examination Board for two years during the period.
- Vice-Chancellor, Allahabad University, October 1961 March 1965.
- Emeritus Scientist of the CSIR, April 1965 March 1970.

- Chemical Adviser to Govt. of Orissa, during World War II.
- Air-raid Warden, World War II.
- Professor in Charge of games and sports in Ravenshaw College.
- Member of Orissa Athletic Association; also was Vice-President for several years.
- Professor in-charge of Poor Boy's Fund and free-studentship committee.
- Treasurer, Bihar Relief Committee.
- Chairman, Institute of Gandhian Studies, Varanasi.
- Chairman, Indian Council of World Affairs, Bihar Branch.
- Chairman, Bihar Literacy Association, Patna.
- Chairman, Bihar Citizen's Council of Higher Education.
- Member, Bihar Gandhi Smarak Sangrahalaya Samiti.

#### AS A PERSON

Professor Prasad's mother was generous and father was wise and brave. He imbibed both the qualities from his parents and as such he was upright and all the same, had a very soft heart. As the Professor-in-charge of Poor Boy's Fund and free-Studentship Committee, he helped the needy students who otherwise could not have continued higher education. He took personal interest in student's well-being. Professor Bimbadhar Nayak in "Decade under Beacon light of a great teacher" describes how critical Prof. Prasad was in his approach in awarding free-studentship to students. During his stay in Ravenshaw College he had always a couple of students staying with him. He was a very kind person. He was easily approachable by members of the teaching staff, as well as, non-teaching staff who would often meet him with personal problems. So did his neighbours. He had a strong attachment for his village. During his first twenty years stay in Cuttack, he used to spend about a month in his village during the summer vacation. During his stay in the village he would help the villagers to settle small disputes under his mediation and avoid running to law of courts and getting financially ruined

A staunch nationalist he felt the importance of teaching in mother tongue. All the same he realized that the importance of English should not be diminished. In the university, teaching should be in English. English has been a great factor in the integration and development of science. He advocated the cause of English in the press. He expressed his opinion on social and political matters freely in the press. He believed in integration and was above narrow casteism and provincialism. He believed that inter-caste and inter-provincial marriage would lead to integration. The boy from Cuttack, Banabihari Das, brought up by him as a son, he got married to a girl from Bihar. His own son was married to the daughter of one of his colleague in Ravenshaw College, who was an Oriya Brahmin. His son Shri Krishna Prasad has retired from Indian Forest Service and is currently living with his wife in

Prasad's home at Rajendra Nagar, Patna. Banbehari Das, the Oriya boy he brought up, is dead. His family members are living at Patna in Prof. Prasad's home there. Professor Prasad's wife Smt. Saraswati Devi was a very kind-hearted lady. She earned the respect and love of all the students of her husband through her motherly affection. The co-writer of this memoir (RK Nanda) lived in Prof. Prasad's house for two years during his student days and deeply cherishes the memories of love and affection bestowed on him both by Prof. Prasad and Mrs. Prasad. She was extremely considerate even to the laboratory assistants, attendants and their families. She made minimum demand on Prof. Prasad's time for social engagements and at the same time alert in looking after his health. She proceeded him in 1970.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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Pt | Q.H.,  $H_2SO_4 \parallel H_2SO_4 \parallel H_2SO_4$ ,  $Hg_2SO_4 \mid Hg$  (c) (c) (c)

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$$\begin{array}{c|cccc} Pb_x \ Hg_y \ | \ HCl \ (m_1) \ | & HCl \ (m_1) \ | & HCl \ (m_1) \ | & AgCl \ | \ Ag \\ & | \ PbCl_2 \ (m_2) \ | & PbCl_2 \ (m_2) \ | & PbCl_2 \ (m_2) \ | & \end{array}$$

