

“AUROBINDO BABU HAS MADE HIS ENTRY INTO CHANDERNAGORE!”

(Excerpts from Motilal Roy's book : *My Life's Partner*)

Motilal Roy

One morning, probably towards the close of the month of Magh, as I was starting for my place of business after breakfast, a friend called aside and said, “Have you heard of the sensational occurrence?” I looked up in surprise. Sensational occurrence meant at this time, some political event of gruesome nature. Over and above, a high police official, named Samsul Huda, had recently been murdered in the High Court of Calcutta. I anxiously waited to hear if there were some more events. My friend added. “Aurobindo Babu has made his entry into Chandernagore. He may even have gone by now. What a pity the matter should end so discredibly!”

I could not catch his meaning and thought that he might have come on some errand. What was wrong in it if he had left, I reflected. But what the friend said in one breath made me apprehend that Aurobindo Babu had run away from Calcutta to Chandernagore and that the gentleman whose shelter he had sought, having refused it, he had probably to go back.

I further heard that Sri Aurobindo had informed his old friend at four o'clock in the morning. It was nearly six o'clock now. I had no acquaintance with him, but I had heard of him and seen him, too, in the Provincial Conference at Hoogly. I used to take an interest in any talk about him, and read about him in connection with the Alipore Bomb Case. He was a contributor to the “Vandemataram”, which for this reason, I loved to read. Sri Aurobindo's self-sacrifice and asceticism had become well-known. After his release from the Alipore Central Jail, his lectures had struck a new note in the political field. His voice had rung out the inmost wishes of India, as it were. My heart had been particularly moistened with the nectarine flow of patriotism displayed in his letters to his wife, Mrinalini Devi, and brought to light in the cross-examination of the law-suit. No one had seemed to love his country so well. I had a firm conviction that freedom would come as a sequel to this great man's *tapasya*. That is a long story to tell I shall have more to say on this topic later. For the present, I leave aside my panegyrics and characterization of him.

I said, “I do not think he is still here. In any case, how did he come?” I ascertained that he had come by boat and intimated his arrival through a youngman. My friend used to go out for his morning tea; he had heard the news casually.

I sprinted off at lightning-speed and came to the bank of the Ganges. Winter mist had just begun to clear up at the first touch of Spring's feet. The sluggish

river danced a rolling step in the morning breeze. The sun had not risen, shot through the cloud-range of the eastern sky. Under the arch of the peepul and banyan trees I wended my way southward.

The early bathers looked agape at me. Where was I hurrying away, was perhaps the one question that agitated the minds of many of my old acquaintances. I was, however, unmindful of them all as if a great magnetic force kept me dancing towards it.

The Strand stretched itself away from the Rani Ghat, where a *pansi*, brought from Calcutta, bobbed up and down in the ripples. The wind played with a portion of the gathered sail, which gave the impression of a decorative flag. On the top of the boat sat a youngman. Fixing the boat with my questioning eyes, I advanced some distance. He did not speak; I, too, could not muster enough courage to speak either, and withdrew a few paces. I turned my face towards him and advanced a few steps again in expectation of being accosted. He, too, was staring at me, I saw. I faced him this time and asked with some diffidence, "Do you hail from Calcutta.?"

"Yes, why do you ask?" the youth replied. I summoned up courage to say, "Is Aurobindo Babu in this boat?"

The youngman called me near and said, "Get into the boat please."

I jumped in and was escorted inside, where I directly came upon an ascetic figure, the very same that I had seen at the Chinsura Provincial Conference, incumbent on the bed with his head supported on another youngman's lap. On seeing me he asked, "Where did you get this news about me?"

I related what I had heard. "What can you do for me? Would it be convenient for you to shelter me?"

Pride tingled through my breast. I was amazed. What convenient to shelter you? I would not hold back my life if it were wanted. My heart was swayed by a riot of emotion—it was an auspicious day perhaps! Let that be. I enthusiastically said, "Indeed, I have come to receive you." Sri Aurobindo intently looked into my face and said smiling, "How far is your residence?"

"A little way up. Do not trouble yourself, I will personally do the arrangement."

I asked the boatman to weigh anchor. The wind blew from the south, and we, too, made for the north. Nevertheless, we came up rowing and berthed in at a place which is at present our Ashram Ghat. To avoid the bathers, I made him disembark at a place not meant for landing. It was the burning-ground. It was here where 'she' had shed tears over her dead daughter and we later commemorated the name of Murarjibhai Patel, designating the place as "Murari Tirtha." Sri Aurobindo tracked me close by the Ashram- site up into our house, drawing little notice or none. I was relieved to have him seated in an easy chair in our parlour.

The two escorts, who had accompanied Sri Aurobindo, took their leave. One of them must have been Nalinikanto or Vijoy; the other was Suresh alias Moni. I picked up acquaintance with them subsequently. I had no notion that they would leave the whole care of Aurobindo Babu, in ray hand. Perhaps circumstances forced them to rely on an utter stranger like me and to entrust the foremost leader of the country to my charge. Anyhow, that was an unalterable decree of God. This event changed the whole face of my future. Had it been otherwise, what other fate might have befallen me is much difficult a question now to answer. Be that as it may. Even though the occurrence is not a figment, it perhaps shows how fatefully God's dispensation comes into operation.

He kept his eyes fixed upon my face. His sympathetic look ranging out of a pair of conspicuous eyes soothed my mind and body. I was getting lost in the inscrutable intricacies of worldly affairs. Sri Aurobindo's unexpected advent opened the southern gates, as it were, and admitted whiffs of vernal breeze, which thrilled my inside and out. In fact, on Nature's bosom too, the first flutter of Spring's feet was noticeable. In my heart's bower, drooping mango twigs put forth new leaves, and I was maddened by the cooings of a thousand cuckoos. I was emotional by nature; my head reeled as if by an over-dose of it. I, too, placed my eyes on his and remained absorbed; I have not lost that memory yet. This exchange of looks fused a bond of close affinity between us, which, I wonder, neither imagined, could ever be falsified. Is it by such tricks that the wily nature hypnotizes men? I have come half-way across my life's ocean; my truth-seeing eyes of to-day, reaching back into the past, cannot call it an illusive sight— it is such a strange life I have!

Sri Aurobindo desired that he intended to live in concealment and that his arrival was to remain a secret. Every precaution was taken. It was a novel task. I could not consider it safe to keep him sitting in the parlour. He was by no means different from many other gentlemen, who used to come, talk and depart in a few days. This simple course could have been adopted without a hitch. But emotional men are by nature restless; they cannot do a thing without an ado. I led him across our unused rooms to a dark apartment on the first floor, set apart as a store-room for chairs. He followed me on tip-toe like a thief. Inside the house could be heard the noise of utensils being scrubbed, women's confused voices and the whizzing of loud-breathing cows in the pen. We signalled by an exchange of glance : "No one could discover this place. Is not it so?"

A thick layer of dust lay settled on the floor. Bats, cockroaches and spiders reigned undisturbed about the beams; I did not dare stir them up in fear of interfering with his rest, I swept the dust away from a part of the floor and laid a carpet, which was covered over by a sheet He sat down noiselessly like a marionette. "I will be back in a moment," I conveyed by a sign; "there will be trouble, if someone enquires for me."

I was constantly haunted by a feeling as if I were being suspected. My wife stared at me as soon as I came down to the compound, I thought: "We are undone, my wife has probably found us out." She smiled feebly. I looked at her in surprise and reasoned: "At the worst if she has got the scent, let me warn her to prevent the news being bruited about." On the other hand, I presumed that men probably pried about just in the same way in the course of their movements; I was, however, constantly troubled to think my secret out. When she drew near, her affectionate hand flitted about my head. She remarked, "Work, work, and all work! You slipped into the godown immediately you were up from bed, I suppose. What a mess you have made! The spiders have laid their webs on your head, I see!" My heart was thumping loudly. I heaved a sigh of relief. Cobwebs and sooty filaments had stuck all over my head; she flicked them off.

A dish of refreshment arrived before me. "I shall have it in the drawing-room," I pretended. She mouthed in her customary way, "Why, can you not sit calmly for a while, a nice hasty fellow that you are!" She, too, was busy; particularly to tidy up the rooms was a hobby with her, as they said. She was not satisfied unless the floor was enough clean to reflect the face. Every article in the house was dusted with a flap and wiped with her scarf to finish it up. Then the thing was blown upon just to make sure that it was now really clean, and was then replaced. Not one article, out of many in the house, went without her daily purifying touch. Every piece of cloth was grasped between her extended hands, shaken from end to end, one side after another, to remove dust, folded up and put back in its place. Standing on a long wooden stool, she mopped cobwebs, accumulated dirt and excreta of vermin between the ribs of the ceiling, I used to laugh and she would retort, "You people love to wallow in dirt; I cannot set my eyes on it."

I would jest: "If you are so very busy with the outside, the inside will remain unclean."

She would cock up her head to say, "I am not forgetful of that either. He who is clean is clean inside and outside. And he who allows refuse to accumulate in the house, cannot be clean within, however much he may brag of it. Only when a man is just the same outwardly and inwardly, he is indeed pure."

I knew she was sincere. I used to argue simply to put her a little off her mettle. But I was chary of time and thought that the gentleman would have been saved this trouble, had the store been in her charge.

I went back to the drawing-room and peeped out just to see if I were being watched. I was particularly in a fix about my wife; she kept an eye on me in her movements in the house. This had become a habit with her in consequence of our joint life. But when she engaged herself in any work, she became absorbed in it; after completing the job, she looked around to find out what I was doing. Thus, I had not been out of her sight for a long period. Does that watchful eye shower similar kindness even to-day without my knowledge, in order to lighten my life's heavy burden?

I stole into the godown very cautiously across the verandah, and went to the second-storey room without making any noise. Opening my eyes wide, I observed that Sri Aurobindo was sitting silently with his eyes fixed in an upward stare. What a complacent and divine look! He had come to my house in an ecstatic state. He had utterly resigned himself to God. When he talked, words came out of his mouth as if someone else made him speak. If his hand moved, it was controlled as it were, by a third agency. I held the refreshment dish before him; he glanced at me innocently. I said, "My wife could not be taken into confidence. It is my own refreshment; please accept it." There was no necessity of making so much fuss about it. Every source of comfort was stopped for him in view of the gravity of keeping him concealed. He partook of some food mechanically.

At noon after everybody had had his or her dinner, I brought him down to our parlour outside and closed the door of the passage between this room and the inner apartments. The outside gate, too, was shut. Two bucketfuls of water were surreptitiously fetched from the well and he was bathed, seated on the floor. It is curious that he raised no objection in any matter. The shiver of winter had not passed yet. His body showed no disposition under the icy-cold water poured down on his head; his hair stood on end, of course. He was feeling cold, I inferred; but he had determined to be firm. I could not scrape up a mid-day meal for him anyhow, as there was no plausible excuse to carry over my plate to our outer room.' In that case, people would know someone had come. He was given some "sweetmeats bought from a stall, with which he filled his belly, I still remember how indifferently he munched the *bazar sweets*, cooked with impure ghee! After his meal, we had a lengthy talk together. It was all about religion. Words can hardly describe his eagerness to give me an inkling of the total resignation with which one has to put oneself into the hand of God.

To arrange for his exit for a call of nature at noon brought things to a pretty pass. It would have presented no difficulty had things been in to-day's condition. Anyhow, that was a happier state perhaps; otherwise there would have been no occasion to make much of a trifle.

The latrine was outside the house and had to be approached through a lane. If he came out, he might be noticed; to make sure, I went inside and took a look at things there. The next thing I did was to make a brief survey of the lane from one end to the other and was reassured that no one was likely to stir out at that time. God perhaps prepared me for a more mysterious way of life through this cautious procedure that I adopted for his ablution in safety.

I was in a further dilemma in the evening, I could not be easy in mind, leaving him alone in that dark room. On the other hand, if I made his bed in the parlour, our people would come to know. After dark, a long consultation with my aforesaid friend led to a disclosure of the facts to another intimate friend. He heard the news with some surprise and offered to lodge Sri Aurobindo at his house.

After ten o'clock in the night, we three escorted him to the friend's house. I could not sleep at night. I was being constantly reminded of his overnight stay. An anxious day passed. In the evening, I visited Sri Aurobindo at the friend's place. He requested me to take him back; he had no sleep the previous night. My friend agreeing, I brought him back to our house.

Our whole suite was examined to clap up a place of concealment for him. A small room in the temple, which in later years was used by boys as a prayer-room, was out of repair and stocked with chairs, I spread his bed on one side of it. After everybody's retirement, I asked him to follow me cautiously. He slowly accompanied me to the room and taking the bed, said, "You may go now, I shall be comfortable here." He loved solitude, I realized. On the previous night, someone had shared the room with him, which interfered with his *sadhana*. I hung a small mosquito curtain, piled up chairs around it more compactly and returned to my apartment.

Sleep was difficult for me at night. If he needed anything—I had not left even a pot of water! At dawn I peeped in; he was sleeping calmly. Arranging his breakfast in due time, I went to my place of business. Had anybody observed my restlessness, my changed manners could not have been concealed. But everyone was busy in his or her own way, and who cared to spy upon?

When I returned home at the usual hour, my wire beckoned me inside. With a face expressive of mingled joy and surprise, she said, "I say, what is up in your sleeve?"

I gazed at her face in speechless perplexity. She added, "How dare you mask your doings from me? How can God stand it!" I reflected: "Hang it! I am down on my luck! How unfortunate, I have failed to observe Sri Aurobindo's direction! "Did he not enjoin secrecy on me?" My fire of determination seemed in those days to burn up within, when I had a chance to carry out one word of his mouth.

Nevertheless, I thought that he had been hidden behind a wall of chairs; surely nobody could see him there. I asked, "What is the matter?"

She now laughed out: "Oh, what a hypocrite, as if he knows nothing! Here you are; I know now why the yard is soggy, the floor of the parlour moist and a piece of wet cloth drying! What is it all about?"

I was now certain that everything had fizzled out. Still I stood agape looking at her, just to hear the finale from her mouth. She continued, "It is my habit to poke and pry into every corner. What a calamity! Such a senseless man you are! Luckily I entered the temple wrapped in a pair of towels; that saved my face. Good God, what a shame!"

She remarked laughing, "How am I to know that you have immured a gentleman in that prison-house? I shifted the chairs just to see if there were any litter in the room and was suddenly down on a human form staring at me!"

I fancied it—was a hallucination, for, how can any man in his senses be there? Goodness knows, it was true indeed! No apparition nor a mean spirit—a whole man looking inquisitively at me! Do you imagine what my plight would have been, if I had no second piece of towel about?”

Feigning anger thus, she now asked, “Who is he, tell me, will you? Is he a murderer or a criminal to be hanged, that you have hidden him thus? What a bad bungling you have done!”

I humbly said, “I have not been able to hide anything from you; even today the truth has come out. You have heard his name—Aurobindo Babu.”

“Does he belong to the Swadeshi group, like Suren Babu?” she interrogated.

As the leader of the Swadeshi Movement, Surendranath Bannerjee had become well-known to the young and the old and even to women. So she said, “Is he the gentleman, whose name is known abroad like that of Suren Babu?” I replied, “Yes, Sri Aurobindo is the genuine leader, a jewel that adorns our country’s head. To escape capture by the police he has come secretly and wants to remain in hiding. He is here for this reason.”

Hearing of my incommodious treatment of him for the last two days, she said, “He has sought refuge with an admirable host, indeed! How long can he stay at this rate!”

I had nothing more to worry about now and was relieved. Breakfast was duly provided in the morning. At noon her own dish was served out; arrangement was made for the night, too. I lost sight of the fact that her own meal was forfeited. I hardly ever bothered on that score. I had taken this matter up once before, only to be ridiculed. I left her charge in the hand of God and went about my business.

As on the previous day, I helped him through a bath at noon, getting him to sit in the parlour. There was a post-prandial talk. He enquired with a chuckle, “She is your wife, I guess.” I said, “That is so.” I remember he had praised her as a woman marked out by many propitious signs in her formation.

The whole noon used to be devoted to the teaching of *yoga*. I still can recollect a discussion about the divine principle, enmeshed in a quadruple sheath. He discoursed ecstatically about Vasudeva, Sankarshan, Prodyumna and Aniruddha, and I listened with rapt attention; On the subject of re-incarnation, he cited instances of the philosophic and practical types of manifestations, explaining in detail that Vyasa was the philosophic type and Sri Krishna the practical. He freely expounded the Upanishadic principles, too. I hardly have words to depict the joy with which we passed the noon-days.

At night, my aforesaid friend used to come to discuss political subjects, which had no attraction for me, and I dozed off reclining on a chair. The discussion used so continue till mid-night. Sri Aurobindo would go to bed then.

I used to read him all the articles I had written. My dramatic piece, Udbodhan, was composed and presented about this time. I read it out to him from start to finish. He remarked, "You write Bengali well, try to write something about religion, if you can."

The literature that had been waiting in me for an exit from the imaginative realm, now flowed at his bidding like the downpour of the Gomukhi. A few short feuilletons appeared on the subject of religion. That copious flow has since run apace even up to date in the pages of the "Prabartak"; my hand has stopped, but not the pen. I do not know if my whole soul stood immobile till now in expectation of a touch from him; the portals of my life now began to open one after another in response to his push. I have tried to explain the yoga of self-surrender in "Udbodhan," but have not perhaps succeeded in being very lucid and elaborate." He opened out the secrets of consecration, and the whole thing now seemed to be clear and possessed my attention. He narrated, one by one, all the wonderful mystic experiences of his jail life and I was fascinated. How he remained suspended in the air at his meditation, how the hard iron bars of the prison-cell felt as soft as butter to his touch, how in the jail-compound devilish-looking thieves and robbers appeared transformed into so many beautiful Brahma-like forms and how divinity was manifested in all material things—he used to relate without a pause.

I have also heard from his mouth that when he was being escorted to the Lai Bazar Police Court, having been arrested by the Grey Street Police, Thackur Sri Ramkrishna sat consoling him all the time. He saw Narayana personified in the trying magistrate, the lawyers, barristers and all in the court-room and was so overjoyed that he entertained no doubt, in his inmost mind, as to his release. It is a long catalogue of facts; to relate all of it from memory would need a treatise like the Mahabharata.

We talked for hours together, leaving nothing undiscussed. I can hardly restrain my laugh, when I remember his numerous bantering remarks. Our close acquaintance made such' an impression in our hearts that it was not to be eradicated without inflicting a greater pain than that of death, at least as far as I was concerned. That memory is undefaceable.

His continual stay at a place might cause the secret to leak out and we talked about his removal. I had no objection in any way. He had come quite unexpectedly; I could not at all imagine that my heart would ache, if he went the same unexpected way back. Nor did I wish to know where he would be taken away. In any case, I was charged to escort him over the town to the southern outskirts, in the darkness of night in a carriage. His disappearance had been reported in the two magazines, "Dharma" and "Karmoyogin". People knew that he had gone among the Himalayas for *sadhana* in response to a call from the Tibetan saint Kuthumi. None the less, the police were more in the know than our countrymen; they were at that time searching for Aurobindo Babu in Calcutta.

What on earth would go wrong, if I drove him in a hackney carriage, was not clear to my senses. At mid-night, when everybody had gone to sleep, I took him to our stable, which was close to our house. The driver was rapt in sleep. I very cautiously led out the two horses and somehow yoked them to the carriage, groping in darkness. He was requested to sit inside with a friend, of mine. I smacked the whip on the back of the horses. One of the horses was a new-comer, who had the habit of pulling the carriage sideways into the gutter. When I think of the anxiety with which I held the reins tight and reached the destination, I feel inclined to laugh even now. It was mid-night and the streets were lonely; we therefore, did not encounter any mishap. Had it been otherwise, I am sure, the coach would have gone over the backs of people. At some point, on our way, the policeman on duty called up a halt. I realized now that the lamp had not been lit. I cracked the whip and drove at top-speed— the policeman made a wry mouth and uttered loud declamations.

He who was keeping tryst at the southern end of the town was entrusted with the keep of Sri Aurobindo, who was in perfect trim. I drove home back. I put the two horses in the stable—the carriage was left on the street, and breathed a sigh of relief on reaching my room. My wife had been prepared for it. She enquired, “Did not the coachman get to know?” I replied, “No.” She was thoughtful and said, “What a serious thing! The carriage and the horses may be stolen any day.” I laughed: “Do you not see that I am not a thief?” My heart had been filled with devotion and regard for Sri Aurobindo. I added, “The whole thing is a miraculous achievement of Sri Aurobindo. The way was not free from danger either!” She did not pursue the matter and said, “You cannot do a thing without a muddle go to bed now.” ...

...I was relieved of the charge after Sri Aurobindo’s departure, but I was left in an utter confusion, as it were. He had spoken of complete resignation to God. Even when the hand moved, it was controlled by an unseen Power, and, as if to explain his meaning, he had lifted his own hand up and said, “Look you, I have not lifted it; another force has taken possession of it and has pushed it up!” Miraculous indeed, if one believed; if not, it could be laughed down, too. I had taken him at his word.

After this talk, I still remember, I watched his movements with great interest. I observed—others might have seen differently—that when he walked, his feet hardly trod the ground, as if he skipped over the surface to alight on his legs somewhere else. I pricked my ears to hear his steps, which being noiseless, made my audibility frankly acknowledge them so.

When he ate, I imagined that he made no effort in the act. He was unmindful at his meal, effort noticing that I was intently watching. I fancied that it was really a third agency that consumed through his mouth. I distinctly recollect that my ears caught no sound of mastication or any other act of eating; it was done noiselessly, top.

Another peculiarity comes to my mind as clearly as the noon-day. His look never seemed to be that of any human being, as if someone behind his eyes elongated the sight to touch me with it. During his sojourn at Chandernagore, he lived a longer time with a few others than with me—I do not know whether all this avowal can stand the test of truth. Even to my wife I spoke with delight and admiration about Sri Aurobindo. She too said, "You make much of what you do or say!" I felt irritated. She remarked, "Why do you get angry for it! How can you expect others to see or understand better than you do? Judged from their angle, you do go a bit too far out."

This stigma still persists. Nevertheless, I am perfectly sure of it from my personal observation.'

Sri Aurobindo kept staring up most of his time. When he was in a communicative mood, I asked, "What do you see with your eyes so focused?" His reply is still as vividly emblazoned on my heart as ever. He said, "A multitude of letters comes trooping down in the air; I try to decipher." He explained again, "Gods of the invisible world become visible. They are significant as the alphabet and want to communicate something, which I endeavour to discover."

The power of environmental influence had been very little appreciated by me yet. Nor had symbolic interpretation received due recognition from me. "Concentrate your mind on Me"—such a mind naturally remained fixed on Him. People may call it imitation; I however, felt that an influence was getting possession of me through his medium. Shoes had been discarded. A friend was aware of Sri Aurobindo's arrival. He had the impudence to remark, "You wear your saintliness upon your sleeve, if I may say so!" My wife too, said without belittling me, "Your conduct may evoke suspicion; you had better not disclose what you aim at."

She was a secretly flowing stream like the Falgu. We had brought contradictory qualities in our union. I never saw her talk aloud. She remained calm in weal and woe; if she were angry, she suppressed her wrath in her breast under a cloak of gravity. On the other hand, I gave out everything in an outburst of emotion. But I find from subsequent developments that this unloading of feelings contained in it submerged facts of my inner life. It was my outward behaviour that deceived people. Nevertheless, if I got angry with anybody, I showed enough kindness too, towards the object of my anger; but if I loved disruption followed. One person alone had correctly understood me; others tuned their lives with her sorrow and were thus able to interpret me. Who else will distrust the object of love as I have done!

My eyes, too, came to be stilled like those of Sri Aurobindo. I am a vegetarian all my life. Once my spiritual aspirations were roused, I was seized with a fervour to acquire a great deal more than my capacity. For this reason, after Sri Aurobindo's departure, I practically passed into a meditative trance. In seeking greater restraint in food, I brought more trouble to my wife. She was

not afraid of labour, but was careful about my endurance. Sri Aurobindo did not use oil at his bath; I too, discarded oil at my bath. Moreover, I gave up the use of salt in my food. This new habit caused some emaciation of my body. She said, "Do you want to acquire virtue by this means? It matters little, if we do nothing outwardly; but who is to dissuade, if something accepted inwardly? It is said that one can dig river, if the mind is sound. My good man, I find no joy in such showiness." I knew the depth of her affection that prompted this remark. But, at the same time, like Sri Aurobindo, I too, had then interested myself for some clue to an access to the Third Power. Serious neglect infected the sphere of domestic duties.

Sri Aurobindo had come fresh from the political arena to Chandernagore. I heard him discuss political problems which flowed out copiously from his mouth. But that was not intended for me; he exclusively gave me directions for spiritual practice. Whatever may have been his inner motive, it was an opportunity to develop a new faculty in me under his care.

He was lodged quite near the temple-hall. I am sure, from the adjacent room he must have heard our daily liturgy, prayer and hymns. Besides, a band of young boys of our locality was inspired with similar aspirations as mine and paid me visits on Sunday mornings. I taught them the formularies of worship and to recite hymns; and in our Sunday debates held at noon, introduced them to the teachings of the Gita and the Upanishads, in spite of my doubtful qualification for the task, equals in age lavished jokes and gibes on my head, for this reason. My pedagogy among these was ridiculed in some quarters as midwifery. Nevertheless, these youngmen, a potential source of unfailing strength to the Samgha as they were, are to-day the backbone of this institution. I realize now, though I did not do so earlier, that the all-knowing God did not commission this blind machine for a fruitless task. Sri Aurobindo may have foreseen the consequences; a far deeper insight too, was not beyond him. He advised me always to remember the following verse of the Gita: "If you rely on me, you will overcome all difficulties through my grace." Whenever darkness chickened in my mind, I used to recall this verse. This *mantra* at last got so inseparably woven into my mental fabric that I could not extricate it without a struggle. He had depicted another piece of *mantra* upon my heart: "I know what is virtue, yet I do not hanker for it; I also know what is vice, but I do not resist it either. I do as thou, seated in my heart, oh Hrishiksha, biddest me do."...

...My days began to pass in this manner. One day my friend came abruptly and said, "Aurobindo Babu has sent for you." I was brought to my senses. It was nearly a month now since I had met him last. I had full information about him, but had no personal contact. It was not my pature to go anywhere beyond my own sphere activities and the habit still remains much the same. I was, for this reason, subjected to frequent strictures. Nevertheless, it was scarcely possible for me to do anything that was not in my grain.

Sri Aurobindo was at this time quartered in my neighbourhood. The northern town having proved unsuitable, he was for some days accommodated in a garden-house at the heart of the town. The place appeared to be too open and he moved to the northern quarter again. I, too, had a hand in this arrangement. He who was in charge of the management is now in the next world. I received news daily from Sri Aurobindo, This gentleman was employed in a mill; he used to go out at nine o'clock, locking the front-gate, and returned at dusk. Food and other necessaries would be kept ready for Sri Aurobindo, who had to spend the whole day alone.

I went to him after night-fall. He made warm enquiries about my health: "You have made yourself scarce; business engagements perhaps!" I should have to tell a long story, if I attempted anything like a right answer. I merely said 'yes' or 'no' and changed the topic.

His food consisted of fruits and roots at this time. This was his own choice. His meal was served after dark. Pistachio was soaking in a cup, I began to peel off the rind. He turned towards me and said smiling, "How do you get on with your sadhana?"

I died of shame, as it were, and could not bring myself to confess my surrender to the natural urges. I was ashamed of looking up at his face. I fully realized that my unrestrained passion for enjoyment had made me more banal and despicable under a saintly masquerade. On his arrival, I had stood before him with a proud heart; to-day I recoiled as if in horror of my own self. I loathed even the company of, a *yogi* like him selfless *sannyasi* though he was; He, however, eagerly looked at me and said, "Why are you ashamed, tell me the situation exactly as it is. I shall give you some fresh directions of *sadhana*."

I do not know how on that day I was maddened by his loving query made so spontaneously, I frankly acknowledged my change in attitude. The foundation of my life-long *sadhana* crumbled to pieces, which moved me to tears. He too, looked at me through tears, as it were, and said with emotion, "You have abandoned the vessel to the hand of Shakti; very well. Your consciousness lies entwined about the vessel; it has to be lifted up. You have spread it full length; do not try to gather it again. All you have to do is to keep your observing consciousness apart. Be on the watch as a spectator. Do not mix yourself up with the ego and will of the vessel."

So deep was the impression on my heart of this practical suggestion that its outlines still remain undefaced. His words brought a spate of tear in my eyes. He consoled me: "Why are you afraid? A long-locked room accumulates dust; when the cleansing begins, the whole thing is stirred up and stifles one's breathing. The body will get purified by this means. Especially, you are doing nothing wrong; you receive your wife's assistance. Fulfilment will come, you will be fulfilled."

His unmistakable vision came as if into visible shape by the sound of his voice. The word 'fulfilment' continued to ring in my ears till recently.

The night deepened. As I was preparing to return, he said, "Come tomorrow, if you can. I am going away shortly." I looked at him in surprise and asked, "Where do you intend to go?" He said smiling, "To some independent country." My surprise intensified. I interrogated, "I suppose, you are going abroad then?" He laughed, "No, inside of India," he said. His answer was veiled, so I did not press him further on this point. I had heard a stray news that he did not favour an incognito life, which, however, he was persuaded to accept at Sister Nivedita's earnestness. He later reconciled himself to this course as having been intended by God. ...

...A week elapsed in this way. I had not met Sri Aurobindo again. Suddenly I had to get busy in arranging for his departure, which had been decided in favour of Pondicherry. My help was needed even in fixing up his mode of travel. I do not know why I stayed away at the send-off, although other details had been attended to and necessary hands provided by me. Between two opposite forces, the body and the consciousness, it was hard to maintain the life's balance. Some time I put my whole soul into work; the next moment I was immobile and sat stock-still. On the night of his departure from Chandernagore, I attended to the necessary details, had my dinner in due time and went to bed.

I heard calls after mid-night. My wife had forbidden me to respond to any unexpected call; if she happened to be awake, she would stop my mouth with her hand. Nevertheless, night-calls were frequent on me for one reason or another. Her solicitude had, therefore, to be disregarded. As I got up, she enquired, "Where do you want to go?"

I replied, "Aurobindo Babu is going away to-day; I may have to meet him."

"That's your sort," she remarked; "you have done a lot; how do you excuse your absence when he is going away! You get along pretty well, but fail at the end. This is just the reason why you create enemies!"

I hurried out of my bed and as soon as I was outside the room, asked my friend what was up.

He said smiling, "He wants to meet you before departure."

I cohered my upper body with the fore-skirt of my *dhuti* and accompanied him. The night was just at the juncture of its third-quarter. Silence reigned everywhere, broken only by the pit-pats of nocturnal animals. The half-moon floated in the sky and the earth was flooded with moon-light. The summer with its grilling heat stood at a dwindling distance. My body was cooled by the spring breeze. Dew had fallen on green grass, which gleamed in moon-light as if set with stars. The Ganges flowed before me and dazzled my eyes as by a mine of diamond particles. I beheld Sri Aurobindo, who stood on the bank awaiting my arrival.

"I eagerly bowed to his feet. He held me to his breast as on the day of his last farewell. The one was a meeting that established me into his grace; the other, to end in eternal separation. The impression of his touch, however, indicated no difference to me in either case.

"I must get going. We shall meet again."

I cast my wondering eyes on his face and said, "How do you sustain that hope in me! Remember me please."

His eyes were suffused with tears, as far as I could see. He laid his hand on my head and said, "You will be fulfilled. Stick to your sadhana do not worry. You have gone a step up, and will go further."

I had no reply and remained silent.

I stood on the bank. He stepped into the boat with other friends. The oars clawed—swash, swash. The craft got under way and was seen sweeping off. Ah, why did the four eyes unite in an un-wavering gaze that day! The sight was painful for both; the haze of intervening half-light grew denser and denser. I turned my face homeward with a sigh. I now realized that my heart had been kept full whether I took advantage of his association or not it became vacant to-day. I sank upon my bed in tears and perhaps fell asleep under the affectionate sweeps of a guiltless hand down my body. In the morning I got up to see a new sun.."



The Way from Ghat of Ganga River to the Residence of Motilal Roy

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