CHAPTER SIX

PRESIDENCY COLLEGE (1)

Little did my people know what Calcutta had in store for me. I was separated from a small group of eccentric school-boys whom I had gathered round myself in Cuttack. But in Calcutta I found crowds of them. No wonder that I soon became the despair of my parents.

This was not my first visit to Calcutta. I had been there several times since my infancy, but every time this great city had intrigued me, bewildered me, beyond measure. I had loved to roam about its wide streets and among its gardens and museums and I had felt that one could not see enough of it. It was like a leviathan which one could look at from outside and go on admiring unceasingly. But this time I came to settle down there and to mix with its inner life. I did not, of course, know then that this was the beginning of a connection which would perhaps last all my life.

Life in Calcutta, like life in any other modern metropolis, is not good for everybody and it has been the ruin of many promising souls. It might have proved disastrous in my case, had not I come there with certain definite ideas and principles fixed in my mind. Though I was passing through a period of stormy transition when I left school, I had by then made certain definite decisions for myself—I was not going to follow the beaten track, come what may; I was going to lead a life conducive to my spiritual welfare and the uplift of humanity; I was going to make a profound study of philosophy so that I could solve the fundamental
problems of life; in practical life I was going to emulate Ramakrishna and Vivekananda as far as possible and, in any case, I was not going in for a worldly career. This was the outlook with which I faced a new chapter in my life.

These decisions were not the offspring of one night's thought or the dictation of any one personality. It had taken me months and years of groping to arrive at them. I had looked into so many books and sat at the feet of so many persons in order to discover how my life should be shaped and what the highest ideals were that I could hold up before myself. The discovery would have been easy and the task of translating it into action still easier if I had not been pulled by my lower self in one direction and by family influence in another. Owing to this double tension the latter portion of my school life was a period of intense mental conflict and of consequent unhappiness. The conflict itself was nothing new. Everybody who sets up an ideal before himself or endeavours to strike out a new path has to go through it. But my suffering was unusually acute for two reasons. Firstly, the struggle overtook me too early in life. Secondly, the two conflicts came upon me simultaneously. If I had encountered them consecutively, the agony would have been greatly alleviated. But man is not always the architect of his fate, he is sometimes the creature of his circumstances.

The strain of a fight on two fronts was so great for a highly-strung lad like myself that it was quite on the cards that I would have ended in a breakdown or in some mental aberration. That I did not do so was due either to sheer luck or to some higher destiny, if one believes in it. Now that I have come out of the ordeal comparatively unscathed, I do not regret what I have been
through. I have this consolation to offer myself that the struggle made a man of me. I gained self-confidence, which I had lacked before and I succeeded in determining some of the fundamental principles of my life. From my experience, I may, however, warn parents and guardians that they should be circumspect in dealing with children possessing an emotional and sensitive nature. It is no use trying to force them into a particular groove, for the more they are suppressed, the more rebellious they become and this rebelliousness may ultimately develop into rank waywardness. On the other hand, sympathetic understanding combined with a certain amount of latitude may cure them of angularities and idiosyncrasies. And when they are drawn towards an idea which militates against worldly notions, parents and guardians should not attempt to thwart or ridicule them, but endeavour to understand them and through understanding to influence them should the need arise.

Whatever may be the ultimate truth about such notions as God, soul and religion, from the purely pragmatic point of view I may say that I was greatly benefited by my early interest in religion and my dabbling in Yoga. I learnt to take life seriously. Standing on the threshold of my college career, I felt convinced that life had a meaning and a purpose. To fulfil that purpose, a regular schooling of the body and the mind was necessary. But for this self-imposed schooling during my school-life, I doubt if I would have succeeded in facing the trials and tribulations of my later years, in view of the delicate constitution with which I had been endowed from my birth.

I have indicated before that up to a certain stage in my life I had fitted into my environment splendidly and
accepted all the social and moral values imposed from without. This happens in the life of every human being. Then there comes a stage of doubt—not merely intellectual doubt like that of Descartes—but doubt embracing the whole of life. Man begins to question his very existence—why he was born, for what purpose he lives, and what his ultimate goal is. If he comes to a definite conclusion, whether of a permanent or of a temporary nature, on such problems, it often happens that his outlook on life changes—he begins to view everything from a different perspective and goes in for a revaluation of existing social and moral values. He builds up a new world of thought and morality within himself and, armed with it, he faces the external world. Thereafter, he either succeeds in moulding his environment in the direction of his ideal or fails in the struggle and succumbs to reality as he finds it.

It depends entirely on a man's psychic constitution how far his doubt will extend and to what extent he would like to reconstruct his inner life, as a stepping stone towards the reconstruction of reality. In this respect, each individual is a law unto himself (or herself). But in one matter we stand on common ground. No great achievement, whether internal or external, is possible without a revolution in one's life. And this revolution has two stages—the stage of doubt or scepticism and the stage of reconstruction. It is not absolutely necessary for revolutionising our practical life—whether individual or collective—that we should tackle the more fundamental problems, in relation to which we may very well have an agnostic attitude. From the very ancient times, both in the East and in the West, there have been schools of philosophy and ethics based on materialism or agnosticism. In my own case,
however, the religious pursuit was a pragmatic necessity. The intellectual doubt which assailed me needed satisfaction and, constituted as I then was, that satisfaction would not have been possible without some rational philosophy. The philosophy which I found in Vivekananda and in Ramakrishna came nearest to meeting my requirements and offered a basis on which to reconstruct my moral and practical life. It equipped me with certain principles with which to determine my conduct or line of action whenever any problem or crisis arose before my eyes.

That does not mean that all my doubts were set at rest once for all. Unfortunately, I am not so unsophisticated as that. Moreover, progress in life means a series of doubts followed by a series of attempts at resolving them.

Perhaps the most bitter struggle I had with myself was in the domain of sex-instinct. It required practically no effort on my part to decide that I should not adopt a career of self-preferment, but should devote my life to some noble cause. It required some effort to school myself, physically and mentally, for a life of service and unavoidable hardship. But it required an unceasing effort, which continues till today, to suppress or sublimate the sex-instinct.

Avoidance of sexual indulgence and even control of active sex-desire is, I believe, comparatively easy to attain. But for one's spiritual development, as understood by Indian Yogis and Saints, that is not enough. The mental background—the life of instinct and impulse—out of which sex-desire arises has to be transformed. When this is achieved, a man or woman loses all sex-appeal and becomes impervious to the sex-appeal of others; he transcends sex altogether. But is it
possible or is it only midsummer madness? According to Ramakrishna it is possible, and until one attains this level of chastity, the highest reaches of spiritual consciousness remain inaccessible to him. Ramakrishna, we are told, was often put to the test by people who doubted his spirituality and mental purity, but on every occasion that he was thrown in the midst of attractive women, his reactions were non-sexual. In the company of women, he could feel as an innocent child feels in the presence of its mother. Ramakrishna used always to say that gold and sex are the two greatest obstacles in the path of spiritual development and I took his words as gospel truth.

In actual practice the difficulty was that the more I concentrated on the suppression or sublimation of the sex-instinct, the stronger it seemed to become, at least in the initial stages. Certain psycho-physical exercises, including certain forms of meditation, were helpful in acquiring sex-control. Though I gradually made progress, the degree of purity which Ramakrishna had insisted on, seemed impossible to reach. I persisted in spite of temporary fits of depression and remorse, little knowing at the time how natural the sex-instinct was to the human mind. As I desired to continue the struggle for the attainment of perfect purity, it followed that I had to visualise the future in terms of a celibate life.

It is now a moot question whether we should spend so much of our time and energy in trying to eradicate or sublimate an instinct which is as inherent in human nature as in animal life. Purity and continence in boyhood and in youth are of course necessary, but what Ramakrishna and Vivekananda demanded was much more than that, nothing less than complete transcend-
ing of sex-consciousness. Our stock of physical and psychic energy is, after all, limited. Is it worth while expending so much of it in an endeavour to conquer sex? Firstly, is complete conquest of sex, that is, a complete transcending or sublimation of the sex-instinct, indispensable to spiritual advancement? Secondly, even if it is, what is the relative importance of sex-control\(^1\) in a life which is devoted not so much to spiritual development as to social service—the greatest good of the greatest number? Whatever the answer to these two questions may be, in the year 1913 when I joined College, it was almost a fixed idea with me that conquest of sex was essential to spiritual progress, and that without spiritual uplift human life had little or no value. But though I was at grips with the demon of sex-instinct, I was still far from getting it under control.

If I could live my life over again, I should not in all probability give sex the exaggerated importance which I did in my boyhood and youth. That does not mean that I regret what I did. If I did err in overemphasising the importance of sex-control, I probably erred on the right side, for certain benefits did accrue therefrom—though perhaps incidentally. For instance, it made me prepare myself for a life which did not follow the beaten track and in which there was no room for ease, comfort, and self-aggrandisement.

To resume my story, I joined the Presidency College, then regarded as the premier College of the Calcutta University. I had three months' holiday before the colleges were to reopen after the summer vacation. But I lost no time in getting into touch with

\(^1\) As I have gradually turned from a purely spiritual ideal to a life of social service, my views on sex have undergone transformation.
that group, an emissary of which I had met a year ago in Cuttack. A lad of sixteen usually feels lost in a big city like Calcutta, but such was not the case with me. Before the College opened I had made myself at home in Calcutta and found a number of friends of my choice.

The first few days of College life were interesting to a degree. The standard of the Matriculation Examination being lower in Indian than in British Universities, Indian matriculates enter College earlier than British boys do. I was barely sixteen and a half years old when I walked into the precincts of Presidency College; nevertheless, like so many others, I felt as if I was suddenly entering into man's estate. That was indeed a pleasurable feeling. We had ceased to be boys and were now men. The first few days were spent in taking stock of our class-mates and sizing them up. Everybody seemed to be anxious to have a look at those who had come out at the top. Hailing from a district town I was inclined to be shy and reserved at first. Some of the students coming from Calcutta schools, like the Hindu and Hare Schools, had a tendency to be snobbish and give themselves airs. But they could not carry on like that, because the majority of the higher places at the Matriculation Examination had been captured by boys from other schools and, moreover, we were soon able to hold our own against the metropolitans.

Before long I began to look out for men of my own way of thinking among my class-mates. Birds of a feather flock together—so I managed to get such a group. It was unavoidable that we should attract a certain amount of attention because we consciously wore a puritanic exterior; but we did not care. In those days
one could observe several groups\(^1\) among the College students, each with a distinctive character. There was firstly a group consisting of the sons of Rajas and rich folks and those who preferred to hobnob with them. They dressed well and took a dilettante interest in studies. Then there was a group of bookworms—well-meaning, goody-goody boys with sallow faces and thick glasses. Thirdly, there was a group similar to ours consisting of earnest boys who considered themselves the spiritual heirs of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. Last but not least, there existed a secret group of revolutionaries about whose existence most of the students were quite unaware. The character of Presidency College itself was different from what it is now.\(^2\) Though it was a Government institution, the students as a rule were anything but loyalist. This was due to the fact that the best students were admitted into the College without any additional recommendation and regardless of their parentage. In the councils of the C.I.D.,\(^3\) the Presidency College students had a bad name—so ran the rumour. The main hostel of the College, known as the Eden Hindu Hostel, was looked upon as a hot-bed of sedition, a rendezvous of revolutionaries, and was frequently searched by the police.

For the first two years of my College life I was greatly under the influence of the group referred to above and I developed intellectually during this period. The group consisted mainly of students, the leaders being two students of the Medical College.\(^4\) It followed generally the teachings of Ramakrishna and

\(^{1}\) Sometimes these groups ran into one another.

\(^{2}\) The presence of men like the late Sir J. C. Bose and Sir P. C. Ray among the professorial staff also had some effect.

\(^{3}\) India's Scotland Yard (Criminal Investigation Department).

\(^{4}\) S.C.B. and K.K.A.
Vivekananda but emphasised social service as a means to spiritual development. It interpreted social service not in terms of building hospitals and charitable dispensaries, as the followers of Vivekananda were inclined to do, but as national reconstruction, mainly in the educational sphere.\footnote{Possibly the example of the Christian Missionaries had some influence.} Vivekananda’s teachings had been neglected by his own followers—by the Ramakrishna Mission which he had founded—and we were going to give effect to them. We could therefore be called the neo-Vivekananda group, and our main object was to bring about a synthesis between religion and nationalism, not merely in the theoretical sphere but in practical life as well. The emphasis on nationalism was inevitable in the political atmosphere of Calcutta of those days.

When I left Cuttack in 1918 my ideas were altogether nebulous. I had a spiritual urge and a vague idea of social service of some sort. In Calcutta I learnt that social service was an integral part of Yoga and it meant not merely relief to the half, the maimed, and the blind, but national reconstruction on modern lines. Beyond this stage, the group did not travel for a long time, because like myself it was groping for more light and for a clarification of its practical ideals. There was one thing highly creditable about the group—its members were exceedingly alert and active, many of them being brilliant scholars. The activity of the group manifested itself in three directions. There was a thirst for new ideas; so new books on philosophy, history, and nationalism were greedily devoured and the information thus acquired was passed on to others. Members of the group were also active in recruiting new members from different institutions in various cities, with the result that before long the group had wide contacts. Thirdly,
the members were active in making contacts with the prominent personalities of the day. Holidays would be utilised for visiting the holy cities like Benares or Hardwar with the hope of meeting men who could give spiritual light and inspiration, while those interested in national history would visit places of historical importance and study history on the spot. I once joined a touring party who journeyed for seven days, book in hand, in the environs of Murshidabad, the pre-British capital of Bengal, and we thereby acquired more insight into the previous history of Bengal than we would have done if we had studied at home or at school for months.

On some important questions the ideas of the group were in a state of flux. Such was the question of our relations with our respective families. The name, constitution, plan of work, etc. of the group were not settled either. But our ideas slowly moved in the direction of a first-class educational institution which would turn out real men and would have branches in different places. Some members of the group interested themselves in the study of existing educational institutions like Tagore’s Santi-Niketan and the Gurukul University in Upper India. In recruiting new members, attention was given to enlisting brilliant students studying different subjects, so that we would have trained professors in all the subjects when the time came for us to launch our scheme. The group stood for celibacy and the leaders held that a breach with one’s family was inevitable at some stage or other. But the members were not given any clear direction to break with their families, though the way they moved about made it inevitable that their families would be estranged. Most of the week-ends were spent away from home, often without permission. Sometimes institutions like the
Ramakrishna Mission's Muth at Belur would be visited. Sometimes important personalities, generally religious people, would be interviewed. Sometimes our own members in different places would invite us and we would spend a day or two with them. Outside college hours most of my time would be spent in the company of members of the group. Home had no attraction for me—for it was a world quite different from that of my dreams. The dualism in my life continued and it was a source of unhappiness. This was accentuated whenever unfavourable comments were made at home about my ideas or activities.

Politically, the group was against terrorist activity and secret conspiracy of every sort. The group was therefore not so popular among the students, for in those days the terrorist-revolutionary movement had a peculiar fascination for the students of Bengal. Even those who would keep at a safe distance from such an organisation would not withhold their sympathy and admiration, so long as they did not land themselves in trouble. Occasionally there would be friction between members of our group and members of some terrorist-revolutionary organisations engaged in recruiting. Once a very interesting incident took place. Since our group was very active, the C.I.D. became very suspicious about its real character, wondering if there was anything hidden behind a religious exterior. Steps were taken to arrest a member whom they considered to be the leader of the group. At this juncture the police intercepted some correspondence passing between members of a terrorist-revolutionary organisation, in which there

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1 We visited the poet Rabindra Nath Tagore also and he gave a discourse on village reconstruction. This was in 1914, years before the Congress took up this work.
was a proposal to liquidate the above leader of our group for luring away some of its members into the path of non-violence. The correspondence revealed our real character to the police and thereby not only prevented the arrest but saved us from police persecution which would otherwise have been unavoidable. In the winter of 1918 we had a camp at Santipur, a place 50 miles from Calcutta on the river Hooghly, where we lived as monks wearing orange-coloured cloths. We were raided by the police and all our names and addresses were taken down, but no serious trouble followed beyond an enquiry into our antecedents.

In my undergraduate days Arabindo Ghose was easily the most popular leader in Bengal, despite his voluntary exile and absence since 1909. His was a name to conjure with. He had sacrificed a lucrative career in order to devote himself to politics. On the Congress platform he had stood up as a champion of left-wing thought and a fearless advocate of independence at a time when most of the leaders, with their tongues in their cheeks, would talk only of colonial self-government. He had undergone incarceration with perfect equanimity. His close association with Lokamanya B. G. Tilak¹ had given him an all-India popularity, while rumour and official allegation had given him an added prestige in the eyes of the younger generation by connecting him with his younger brother, Barindra Kumar Ghose, admittedly the pioneer of the terrorist movement. Last but not least, a mixture of spirituality and politics had given him a halo of mysticism and made his personality more fascinating to those who were

¹ Lokamanya Tilak was popularly known as 'Bardada' or Elder Brother and Arabindo as 'Chotdada' or Younger Brother. Tilak was the leader of the left-wing or 'extremist' party in the Congress.
religiously inclined. When I came to Calcutta in 1918, Arabindo was already a legendary figure. Rarely have I seen people speak of a leader with such rapturous enthusiasm and many were the anecdotes of this great man, some of them probably true, which travelled from mouth to mouth. I heard, for instance, that Arabindo had been in the habit of indulging in something like automatic writing. In a state of semi-trance, pencil in hand, he would have a written dialogue with his own self, giving him the name of ‘Manik’. During his trial, the police came across some of the papers in which the ‘conversations’ with ‘Manik’ were recorded, and one day the police prosecutor, who was excited over the discovery, stood up before the Court and gravely asked for a warrant against a new conspirator, ‘Manik’, to the hilarious amusement of the gentlemen in the dock.

In those days it was freely rumoured that Arabindo had retired to Pondicherry for twelve years’ meditation. At the end of that period he would return to active life as an ‘enlightened’ man, like Gautama Buddha of old, to effect the political salvation of his country. Many people seriously believed this, especially those who felt that it was well nigh impossible to successfully contend with the British people on the physical plane without the aid of some supernatural force. It is highly interesting to observe how the human mind resorts to spiritual nostrums when it is confronted with physical difficulties of an insurmountable character. When the big agitation started after the partition of Bengal in 1905, several mystic stories were in circulation. It was said, for instance, that on the final day of reckoning with the British there would be a ‘march of the blanketeers’ into Fort William in Calcutta. Sannyasis or fakirs with blankets on their shoulders would enter the Fort. The
British troops would stand stock-still, unable to move or fight, and power would pass into the hands of people. Wish is father to the thought and we loved to hear and to believe such stories in our boyhood.

As a College student it was not the mysticism surrounding Arabindeo's name which attracted me, but his writings and also his letters. Arabindeo was then editing a monthly journal called *Arya* in which he expounded his philosophy. He used also to write to certain select people in Bengal. Such letters would pass rapidly from hand to hand, especially in circles interested in spirituality-cum-politics. In our circle usually somebody would read the letter aloud and the rest of us would enthuse over it. In one such letter Arabindeo wrote, 'We must be dynamos of the divine electricity so that when each of us stands up, thousands around may be full of the light—full of bliss and Ananda.' We felt convinced that spiritual enlightenment was necessary for effective national service.

But what made a lasting appeal to me was not such flashy utterances. I was impressed by his deeper philosophy. Shankara's doctrine of Maya was like a thorn in my flesh. I could not accommodate my life to it nor could I easily get rid of it. I required another philosophy to take its place. The reconciliation between the One and the Many, between God and Creation, which Ramakrishna and Vivekananda had preached, had indeed impressed me but had not till then succeeded in liberating me from the cobwebs of Maya. In this task of emancipation, Arabindeo came as an additional help. He worked out a reconciliation between Spirit and Matter, between God and Creation, on the metaphysical side and supplemented it with a synthesis of the methods of attaining the truth—a synthesis of Yoga, as he called it.
Thousands of years ago the Bhagavad Gita had spoken about the different Yogas—Jnana Yoga or the attainment of truth through knowledge; Bhakti Yoga or the attainment of truth through devotion and love; Karma Yoga or the attainment of truth through selfless action. To this, other schools of Yoga had been added later—Hatha Yoga aiming at control over the body and Raja Yoga aiming at control over the mind through control of the breathing apparatus. Vivekananda had no doubt spoken of the need of Jnana (knowledge), Bhakti (devotion and love) and Karma (selfless action) in developing an all-round character, but there was something original and unique in Arambindo’s conception of a synthesis of Yoga. He tried to show how by a proper use of the different Yogas one could rise step by step to the highest truth. It was so refreshing, so inspiring, to read Arambindo’s writings as a contrast to the denunciation of knowledge and action by the later-day Bengal Vaishnavas. All that was needed in my eyes to make Arambindo an ideal guru for mankind was his return to active life.

Of quite a different type from Arambindo was Surendra Nath Bennerji, once the hero of Bengal and certainly one of the makers of the Indian National Congress. I saw him for the first time at a meeting of the Calcutta Town Hall¹ in connection with Mahatma Gandhi’s Satyagraha² campaign in South Africa. Surendra Nath was still in good form and with his modulated voice and rolling periods he was able to collect a large sum of money at the meeting. But despite his flowery rhetoric and consummate oratory, he lacked that deeper passion which one could find in such simple words of

¹ This was probably towards the end of 1913 or the beginning of 1914.
² This may be paraphrased as ‘passive resistance’ or ‘civil disobedience’.
Arabindo: 'I should like to see some of you becoming great; great not for your own sake, but to make India great, so that she may stand up with head erect amongst the free nations of the world. Those of you who are poor and obscure—I should like to see their poverty and obscurity devoted to the service of the motherland. Work that she might prosper, suffer that she might rejoice'.

So long as politics did not interest me, my attention was directed towards two things—meeting as many religious teachers as possible and qualifying for social service. I doubt if there was any religious group or sect in or near Calcutta with whom we did not come into contact. With regard to social service, I had some novel and interesting experience. When I became cager to do some practical work, I found out a society for giving aid to the poor. This society used to collect money and foodstuffs every Sunday by begging from door to door. The begging used to be done by student-volunteers and I became one of them. The collections used to consist mainly of rice, and each volunteer had to bring in between 80 and 160 lbs. of rice at the end of his round. The first day I went out sack in hand for collecting rice, I had to overcome forcibly a strong sense of shame, not having been accustomed to this sort of work. Up to this day I do not know if the members of our family were ever aware of this activity of mine. The sense of shame troubled me for a long time and, whenever there was any fear of coming across a known face, I simply did not look to the right or to the left but jogged along with the sack in my hand or over my shoulders.

1 An extract from a political speech of Arabindo which my eldest brother was fond of repeating.
2 The Anath Bhandar of South Calcutta.
At College I began to neglect my studies. Most of the lectures were uninteresting\(^1\) and the professors still more so. I would sit absent-minded and go on philosophizing about the why and wherefore of such futile studies. Most boring of all was the professor of mathematics whose monotonous drawling out of what appeared to be meaningless formulae would bring me to the verge of desperation. To make life more interesting and purposeful, I engaged in various public activities of the student community, barring sports of course. I also went out of my way to get acquainted with such professors as Sir P. C. Ray, the eminent chemist and philanthropist, who did not belong to our department but was extremely popular with the students. Organising debates, collecting funds for flood and famine relief, representing the students before the authorities, going out on excursions with fellow-students—such activities were most congenial to me. Very slowly I was shedding my introvert tendencies and social service was gaining ground on the individualistic Yoga.

I sometimes wonder how at a particular psychological moment a small incident can exert a far-reaching influence on our life. In front of our house in Calcutta, an old, decrepit beggar woman used to sit every day and beg for alms. Every time I went out or came in, I could not help seeing her. Her sorrowful countenance and her tattered clothes pained me whenever I looked at her or even thought of her. By contrast, I appeared to be so well-off and comfortable that I used to feel like a criminal. What right had I—I used to think—to be so fortunate to live in a three-storied house when this miserable beggar woman had hardly a roof over her head.

\(^1\) This impression must have been due partly to the fact that my interest in studies had flagged.
and practically no food or clothing? What was the value of Yoga if so much misery was to continue in the world? Thoughts like these made me rebel against the existing social system.

But what could I do? A social system could not be demolished or transformed in a day. Something had to be done for this beggar woman in the meantime and that unobtrusively. I used to get money from home for going to and returning from College by tramcar. This I resolved to save and spend in charity. I would often walk back from College—a distance of over three miles—and sometimes even walk to it when there was sufficient time. This lightened my guilty conscience to some extent.

During my first year in College I returned to Cuttack to spend the vacations there with my parents. My Calcutta record was much worse than my Cuttack record, so there was no harm in letting me return to my friends there. At Cuttack, though I had regularly roamed about with my friends, I had never absented myself from home at night. But in Calcutta I would often be absent for days without obtaining permission. On returning to Cuttack, I got into my old set again. Once, when my parents were out of town, I was invited to join a party of friends who were going into the interior on a nursing expedition in a locality which was stricken with cholera. There was no medical man in the party. We had only a half-doctor, whose belongings consisted of a book on homoeopathy, a box of homoeopathic medicines, and plenty of common sense. We were to be the nurses in the party. I readily agreed and took leave of my uncle, who was then doing duty for my father, saying that I would be away a few days. He did not object, not knowing at the time that I was
going out to nurse cholera patients. I was out for only a week, as my uncle came to know of our real plans a few days after I had left and sent another uncle post-haste after me to bring me back. The searching party had to scour the countryside before they could spot us.

In those days cholera was regarded as a fatal disease and it was not easy to get people to attend cholera patients. Our party was absolutely fearless in that respect. In fact, we took hardly any precautions against infection and we all lived and dined together. In the way of actual medical relief, I do not think we could give much. Many had died before we arrived there and, among the patients we found and nursed, the majority did not recover. Nevertheless, a week’s experience opened a new world before my eyes and unfolded a picture of real India, the India of the villages—where poverty stalks over the land, men die like flies, and illiteracy is the prevailing order. We had very little with us in the way of bedding and clothing, because we had to travel light in order to be able to cover long distances on foot. We ate what we could get in the way of food and slept where we could. For me, one of the most astonishing things was the surprise with which we were greeted when we first arrived on the scene of our humanitarian efforts. It intrigued the poor villagers to know why we had come there. Were we Government officials? Officials had never come to nurse them before. Neither had well-to-do people from the town bothered about them. They therefore concluded that we must have undertaken this tour in order to acquire reputation or merit. It was virtually impossible to knock this idea out of their heads.

When I was back in Calcutta the craze for ‘Sadhu’-hunting continued. About sixty miles from the city,
on the bank of a river near a district town, there lived a young ascetic hailing from the Punjab. Along with a friend of mine I would visit him frequently whenever I could get away from Calcutta. This ascetic would never take shelter under a roof, for the ideal which he evidently practised was

"The sky the roof, the grass the bed
And food what chance may bring."

I was greatly impressed by this man—his complete renunciation of worldly desires, his utter indifference to heat, cold, etc., his mental purity and loving temperament. He would never ask for anything, but as often happens in India, crowds would come to him and offer food and clothing, and he would take only his minimum requirements. If only he had been more intellectually developed, he could have lured me from my worldly moorings.

After I came into contact with this ascetic, the desire to find a guru grew stronger and stronger within me and, in the summer vacation of 1914, I quietly left on a pilgrimage with another friend of mine. I borrowed some money from a class friend who was getting a scholarship and repaid him later from my scholarship. Of course, I did not inform anybody at home and simply wrote a postcard when I was far away. We visited some of the well-known places of pilgrimage in Upper India—Lachman-Jhola, Hrishikesh, Hardwar,

1 H. K. S.

2 When it was about midday, he would light five fires (Panchagni) and sitting in the middle would practise meditation in the scorching sun. He told me that snakes would often crawl over his body at night but that did not disturb his sleep.

3 Among his visitors were the C.I.D. who wanted to know if he was merely a harmless ascetic.

4 H. P. C.
Muttra, Brindaban, Benares, Gaya. At Hardwar we were joined by another friend. In between we also visited places of historical interest like Delhi and Agra. At all these places we looked up as many Sadhus as we could and visited several ‘Ashramas’ as well as educational institutions like Gurukul and Rishikul.¹ At one of the Ashramas in Hardwar they felt uncomfortable when we went there, not knowing if we were really spiritually minded youths or were Bengalee revolutionaries appearing in that cloak. This tour which lasted nearly two months brought us in touch not only with a number of holy men, but also with some of the patent shortcomings of Hindu society, and I returned home a wiser man, having lost much of my admiration for ascetics and anchorites. It was well that I had this experience off my own bat, for in life there are certain things which we have to learn for ourselves.

The first shock that I received was when, at an eating-house in Hardwar, they refused to serve us food. Bengalees, they said, were unclean like Christians because they ate fish. We could bring our plates and they would pour out the food, but we would have to go back to our lodging and eat there. Though one of my friends was a Brahman, he too had to eat humble pie. At Buddha-Gaya we had a similar experience. We were guests at a Muth to which we have been introduced by the head of the Ramakrishna Mission at Benares. When we were to take our food we were asked if we would not like to sit separately, because all of us were not of the same caste. I expressed my surprise at this question because

¹ These are homes for ascetics. Nowadays there are also Ashramas for political workers.

² These are institutions based on ancient Hindu ideals. The Gurukul being connected with the Arya Samaj is naturally more reformist in outlook than the Rishikul, especially in the matter of caste.
they were followers of Shankaracharya, and I quoted a verse\(^1\) of his in which he had advised people to give up all sense of difference. They could not challenge my statement because I was on strong ground. The next day when we went for a bath we were told by some men there not to draw the water from the well because we were not Brahmans. Fortunately, my Brahman friend, who was in the habit of hanging his sacred thread on a peg, had it on him at the moment. With a flourish he pulled it out from under his chaddar and just to defy them he began to draw the water and pass it on to us, much to their discomfiture.\(^2\)

At Muttra we lived in the house of a Panda\(^3\) and visited a hermit who was living in an underground room on the other bank of the river. He strongly advised us to return home and to give up all ideas of renouncing the world. I remember I was greatly annoyed at a hermit speaking in that fashion. While we were at Muttra we became very friendly with an Arya Samajist\(^4\) living next door. This was too much for our Panda who gave us a warning that these Arya Samajists were dangerous men since they denounced image-worship.

The monkeys at Muttra who could not be kept down in any way, were a regular pest. If any door or window was left ajar for any brief moment they would force their

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\(^1\) Sarvatrotsarija Bheda-jnanam.
\(^2\) All this happened in 1914. But India is now a changed country.
\(^3\) A Panda is a Brahman priest attached to one of the temples. He runs a boarding-house where pilgrims visiting the place come and stay. Many of them are regular blood-suckers and make the life of the pilgrims miserable from the time they reach the railway station.
\(^4\) The Arya Samaj was founded by Dayananda Saraswati. It aimed at a purification of Hindu religion and Hindu society by reverting to the pristine purity of the ancient times and of the original scriptures—the Vedas. The Arya Samaj does not believe in image-worship or in the caste system. In this respect it is similar to the Brahma Samaj. The Arya Samaj has a large following in the Punjab and also in the United Provinces.
way in and carry away what they found or tear it into bits. We were not sorry to leave Muttra and from there we proceeded to Brindaban where on arrival we were surrounded by several Pandas who offered us board and lodging. To get out of their clutches we said that we wanted to go to the Gurukul institution. At once they put their fingers to their ears and said that no Hindu should go there. However, they were good enough to spare us their company.

Several miles away from Brindaban at a place called Kusum Sarobar, a number of Vaishnava ascetics were living in single-roomed cottages amid groves where deer and peacocks were roaming. It was indeed a beautiful spot—'meet nurse' for a religious mind. We visited them and were given a warm welcome and spent several days in their company. In that brotherhood was one Mouni Baba who had not spoken a word for ten years. The leader or guru of this colony was one Ramakrishnadas Babaji who was well-versed in Hindu philosophy. In his talks he maintained the position that the Vaishnavic doctrine of Dwaitadwaita¹ represented a further progress beyond the Adwaita doctrine of Monism of Shankaracharya. At that time Shankaracharya’s doctrine represented to me the quintessence of Hindu philosophy—though I could not adapt my life to it and found the teaching of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda to be more practical—and I did not relish hearing Shankaracharya assailed by anyone. On the whole, I enjoyed my stay at Kusum-Sarobar and we left with a very high opinion of the ascetics there.

Coming to Benares we were welcomed at the Ramakrishna Mission’s Muth by the late Swañi Brahmananda

¹ This could perhaps be translated as ‘Dualism beyond Monism’. 
who knew my father and our family quite well. While I was there, a great deal of commotion was taking place at home. My parents who had waited long for my return were now feeling desperate. Something had to be done by my brothers and uncles. But what could they do? To inform the police did not appeal to them, for they were afraid that the police might harass more than they might help. So they betook themselves to a fortune-teller who had a reputation for honesty. This gentleman after taking counsel with the spirits announced that I was hale and hearty and was then at a place to the north-west of Calcutta, the name of which began with the letter B. It was immediately decided that that place must be Baidyanath for there was an Ashrama there at the head of which was a well-known Yogi. No sooner was this decision made than one of my uncles was packed off there to get hold of me. But it proved to be a wild-goose chase for I was then at Benares.

After an exciting experience I turned up one fine morning quite unexpectedly. I was not repentant for having taken French leave, but I was somewhat crest-fallen, not having found the guru I had wanted so much. A few days later I was in bed, down with typhoid—the price of pilgrimage and guru-hunting. Not even the soul can make the body defy the laws of health with impunity.

While I lay in bed the Great War broke out.

1 Or rather Vaidyanath; in Bengali the pronunciation would be the same.
CHAPTER SEVEN

PRESIDENCY COLLEGE (2)

In spite of the political atmosphere of Calcutta and the propaganda carried on among the students by the terrorist-revolutionaries, I wonder how I would have developed politically, but for certain fortuitous circumstances. I often met, either in College or in the Hostel, several of those who—I learnt afterwards—were important men in the terrorist-revolutionary movement and who later were on the run. But I was never drawn towards them, not because I believed in non-violence as Mahatma Gandhi does, but because I was then living in a world of my own and held that the ultimate salvation of our people would come through process of national reconstruction. I must confess that the ideas of our group as to how we would be ultimately liberated were far from clear. In fact, it was sometimes seriously discussed whether it would not be a feasible plan to let the British manage the defence of India and reserve the civil administration to ourselves. But two things forced me to develop politically and to strike out an independent line for myself—the behaviour of Britishers in Calcutta and the Great War.

Since I left the P. E. School in January, 1909, I had had very little to do with Britishers. Between 1909 and 1918, only occasionally did I see a Britisher—perhaps some official visiting the school. In the town of Cuttack, too, I saw little of them, for they were few and lived in a remote part. But in Calcutta it was different. Every day while going to or returning from College, I had to pass through the quarter inhabited by
Incidents in tram-cars occurred not infrequently. Britishers using these cars would be purposely rude and offensive to Indians in various ways. Sometimes they would put their feet up on the front-seats if they happened to be occupied by Indians, so that their shoes would touch the bodies of the latter. Many Indians—poor clerks going to office—would put up with the insult, but it was difficult for others to do so. I was not only sensitive by temperament but had been accustomed to a different treatment from my infancy. Often hot words would pass between Britishers and myself in the tram-cars. On rare occasions some Indian passengers would come to blows with them. On the streets the same thing happened. Britishers expected Indians to make way for them and if the latter did not do so, they were pushed aside by force or had their ears boxed. British Tommies were worse than civilians in this matter and among them the Gordon Highlanders had the worst reputation. In the railway trains it was sometimes difficult for an Indian to travel with self-respect, unless he was prepared to fight. The railway authorities or the police would not give the Indian passengers any legitimate protection, either because they were Britishers (or Anglo-Indians) themselves or because they were afraid of reporting against Britishers to the higher authorities. I remember an incident at Cuttack when I was a mere boy. One of my uncles had to return from the railway station because Britishers occupying the higher class compartments would not allow an Indian to come in. Occasionally we would hear stories of Indians in high position, including High Court judges, coming into conflict with Britishers in railway trains. Such stories had a knack of travelling far and wide.

Whenever I came across such an incident my dreams
would suffer a rude shock, and Shankaracharya's Doctrine of Maya would be shaken to its very foundations. It was quite impossible to persuade myself that to be insulted by a foreigner was an illusion that could be ignored. The situation would be aggravated if any Britishers on the College staff were rude or offensive to us. Unfortunately such instances were not rare.¹ I had some personal experience of them during my first year in College but they were not of a serious nature, though they were enough to stir up bitterness.

In conflicts of an inter-racial character the law was of no avail to Indians. The result was that after some time Indians, failing to secure any other remedy, began to hit back. On the streets, in the tram-cars, in the railway trains, Indians would no longer take things lying down.² The effect was instantaneous. Everywhere the Indian began to be treated with consideration. Then the word went round that the Englishman understands and respects physical force and nothing else. This phenomenon was the psychological basis of the terrorist-revolutionary movement—at least in Bengal.

Such experience as related above naturally roused my political consciousness but it was not enough to give a definite turn to my mental attitude. For that the shock of the Great War was necessary. As I lay in bed in July, 1914, glancing through the papers and somewhat disillusioned about Yogis and ascetics, I began to re-examine all my ideas and to revalue all the hitherto accepted values. Was it possible to divide a

¹ Before my time on several occasions English professors had been thrashed by the students. These stories were carefully chronicled and handed down from generation to generation.

² I knew a student in College, a good boxer, who would go out for his constitutional to the British quarter of the city and invite quarrels with Tommies.
nation’s life into two compartments and hand over one of them to the foreigner, reserving the other to ourselves? Or was it incumbent on us to accept or reject life in its entirety? The answer that I gave myself was a perfectly clear one. If India was to be a modern civilised nation, she would have to pay the price and she would not by any means shirk the physical, the military, problem. Those who worked for the country’s emancipation would have to be prepared to take charge of both the civil and military administration. Political freedom was indivisible and meant complete independence of foreign control and tutelage. The war had shown that a nation that did not possess military strength could not hope to preserve its independence.

After my recovery I resumed my usual activities and spent most of my time with my friends, but inwardly I had changed a great deal. Our group was developing rapidly, in number and in quality. One of the leading members, a promising doctor,\(^1\) was sent to England for further studies so that on his return he could be of greater assistance to the group and greater service to the country. Everyone who could afford it contributed his mite towards his expenses and I gave a portion of my scholarship. Following this, another leading member accepted a commission in the Indian Medical Service, and it was hoped that he would thereby gain valuable experience and also lay by some money for future work.

After two years’ hectic life my studies were in a hopeless condition. At the Intermediate Examination in 1915, though I was placed in the first division (which, by the way, was an easy affair), I was low down in the

\(^1\) This experiment ended in failure for he married a French lady and settled in England and never returned to India.
list. I had a momentary feeling of remorse and then resolved to make good at the degree examination.

For my degree, I took the honours course in philosophy—a long cherished desire. I threw myself heart and soul into this work. For the first time in my College career I found interest in studies. But what I gained from this was quite different from what I had expected in my boyhood. At school I had expected that a study of philosophy would give me wisdom—knowledge about the fundamental questions of life and the world. I had possibly looked upon the study of philosophy as some sort of Yogic exercise and I was bound to be disappointed. I actually acquired not wisdom but intellectual discipline and a critical frame of mind. Western philosophy begins with doubt (some say it ends with doubt also). It regards everything with a critical eye, takes nothing on trust, and teaches us to argue logically and to detect fallacies. In other words, it emancipates the mind from preconceived notions. My first reaction to this was to question the truth of the Vedanta on which I had taken my stand so long. I began to write essays in defence of materialism, purely as an intellectual exercise. I soon came into conflict with the atmosphere of our group. It struck me for the first time that they were dogmatic in their views, taking certain things for granted, whereas a truly emancipated man should accept nothing without evidence and argument.

I was proceeding merrily with my studies when a sudden occurrence broke into my life. One morning in January, 1916, when I was in the College library I heard that a certain English professor had malhandled some students belonging to our year. On enquiry it appeared that some of our class-mates were walking along the corridor adjoining Mr O.'s lecture-room, when
Mr O., feeling annoyed at the disturbance, rushed out of the room and violently pushed back a number of students who were in the front row. We had a system of class-representatives whom the Principal\(^1\) consulted on general matters and I was the representative of my class. I immediately took the matter up with the Principal and suggested among other things that Mr O. should apologise to the students whom he had insulted. The Principal said that since Mr O. was a member of the Indian Educational Service, he could not coerce him into doing that. He said further that Mr O. had not malhandled any students or used force against them—but had simply “taken them by the arm” which did not amount to an insult. We were naturally not satisfied and the next day there was a general strike of all the students. The Principal resorted to all sorts of coercive and diplomatic measures in order to break the strike, but to no avail. Even the Moulvi Sahib’s efforts to wean away the Muslim students ended in failure. Likewise the appeals of popular professors like Sir P. C. Ray and Dr D. N. Mullick fell flat. Among other disciplinary measures, the Principal levied a general fine on all the absentee students.

A successful strike in the Presidency College was a source of great excitement throughout the city. The strike contagion began to spread, and the authorities began to get nervous. One of my professors who was rather fond of me was afraid that I would land myself in trouble being one of the strike-leaders. He took me aside and quietly asked me if I realised what I was in for. I said that I was—whereupon he said that he would say nothing more. However, at the end of the second day’s strike, pressure was brought to bear on Mr O. He

\(^1\) Mr H. R. J. (deceased)
sent for the students' representatives and settled the dispute amicably with them, a formula honourable to both parties having been devised in the meantime.

The next day the lectures were held and the students assembled in an atmosphere of 'forgive and forget'. It was naturally expected that after the settlement the Principal would withdraw the penal measures he had adopted during the strike, but they were disappointed. He would not budge an inch—the fine would have to be paid unless a student pleaded poverty. All appeals made by the students as well as by the professors proved to be unavailing. The fine rankled in the minds of the students, but nothing could be done.

About a month later a similar incident came like a bolt from the blue. The report went out that Mr O. had again malhandled a student—but this time it was a student of the first year. What were the students to do? Constitutional protests like strikes would simply provoke disciplinary measures and appeals to the Principal would be futile. Some students therefore decided to take the law into their own hands. The result was that Mr O. was subjected to the argument of force and in the process was beaten black and blue. From the newspaper office to Government House everywhere there was wild commotion.

It was alleged at the time that the students had attacked Mr O. from behind and thrown him down the stairs. This allegation is entirely false. Mr O. did receive one solitary stroke from behind, but that was of no account. His assailants—those who felled him—were all in front of him and on the same level with him. Being an eye witness myself I can assert this without fear of contradiction. It is necessary that this point should be made clear in fairness to the students.
Immediately after this the Government of Bengal issued a communiqué ordering the College to be closed and appointing a Committee of Enquiry to go into the continued disturbances in that institution. The temper of the Government was naturally very high and it was freely rumoured that the Government would not hesitate to close down the College for good. No doubt the Government would have given the fullest support to the staff as against the students. But as ill-luck would have it, the Principal fell out with the Government over the official communiqué. As the Government orders were issued over his head, he felt that his amour propre had been hurt and his prestige damaged. He called on the Honourable Member in charge of Education and made a scene at his place. The next day another official communiqué was issued saying that the Principal\(^1\) was placed under suspension for "gross personal insult" to the Honourable Member.

But before power could slip out of his hands the Principal acted. He sent for all those students who were in his black list including myself. To me he said—or rather snarled—in unforgettable words, "Bose, you are the most troublesome man in the College. I suspend you." I said "Thank you," and went home. Shankaracharya’s Maya lay dead as a door nail.

Soon after the Governing Body met and confirmed the Principal’s order. I was expelled from the Presidency College. I appealed to the University for per-

\(^1\) Subsequently, the Principal was reinstated, probably after he had made amends and then he retired for good. Here I must say in fairness to him that he was very popular with the students for protecting them against police persecution on several occasions. On the present occasion he probably lost his head and could not decide whether he should side entirely with the authorities or with the students. If he had done either, he would have had at least one party to side with him.
mission to study in some other college. That was refused. So I was virtually rusticated from the University.

What was to be done? Some politicians comforted me by saying that the Principal’s orders were _ultra vires_ since the Committee of Enquiry had taken over all his powers. All eyes were turned to the Committee.

The Committee was presided over by Sir Asutosh Mukherji, former Vice-Chancellor and Judge of the High Court. Naturally we expected justice. I was one of those who had to represent the students’ case. I was asked a straight question—Whether I considered the assault on Mr O. to be justified. My reply was that though the assault was not justified, the students had acted under great provocation. And I then proceeded to narrate seriatim the misdeeds of the Britishers in Presidency College during the last few years. It was a heavy indictment, but wiseacres thought that by not unconditionally condemning the assault on Mr O. I had ruined my own case. I felt, however, that I had done the right thing regardless of its effect on me.

I lingered on in Calcutta hoping against hope that something favourable would turn up. The Committee submitted its report and there was hardly a word in favour of the students. Mine was the only name singled out for mention—so my fate was sealed.

Meanwhile the political atmosphere in Calcutta grew from bad to worse. Wholesale arrests were made, and among the latest victims were some expelled students of the Presidency College. My elder brothers were alarmed and held a hurried consultation. The consensus of opinion was that to stay in Calcutta without any ostensible vocation was extremely risky. I should, therefore, be packed off to a quiet corner like Cuttack where there was comparative safety.
Lying on the bunk in the train at night I reviewed the events of the last few months. My educational career was at an end, and my future was dark and uncertain. But I was not sorry—there was not a trace of regret in my mind for what I had done. I had rather a feeling of supreme satisfaction, of joy that I had done the right thing, that I had stood up for our honour and self-respect and had sacrificed myself for a noble cause. After all, what is life without renunciation, I told myself. And I went to sleep.

Little did I then realise the inner significance of the tragic events of 1916. My Principal had expelled me, but he had made my future career. I had established a precedent for myself from which I could not easily depart in future. I had stood up with courage and composure in a crisis and fulfilled my duty. I had developed self-confidence as well as initiative, which was to stand me in good stead in future. I had a foretaste of leadership—though in a very restricted sphere—and of the martyrdom that it involves. In short, I had acquired character and could face the future with equanimity.
CHAPTER EIGHT

MY STUDIES RESUMED

It was the end of March, 1916, when I came down to Cuttack as a rusticated student. Fortunately, no stigma attached to that appellation. By students everywhere I was regarded with sympathy tinged with respect, because I had stood up for their cause. There was no change whatsoever in the attitude of my parents and, strange to say, my father never put one question to me about the events in College or my part therein. My elder brothers in Calcutta had sympathised with me in my tribulations believing that I had done the right thing in the circumstances that I had to face. My parents' attitude, as far as I could judge from their behaviour in spite of their reserve, seemed to be that I had to suffer for being the spokesman of the students. It was a great relief to know that I had the sympathy of those with whom I had to spend my days and nights and that they did not think ill of me because I had been sent down.

Thus my relations with my family did not suffer a setback, but rather improved. The same could not be said of the group. Throughout the exciting events of January and February I had not taken counsel with them and had acted entirely on my own initiative. Later on I gathered that they did not quite approve of what I had done and would have liked to see me avoid a direct conflict with the powers that be. When I decided to leave Calcutta I did not so much as inform them, though previously I had spent days and nights in their company, joining in their plans for the future. By this
time the group had become a well-knit organisation. Most of the important members in Calcutta belonging to different institutions used to live in one boarding-house, where every afternoon those living at home or in other hostels would assemble for discussion and exchange of ideas. The group was bringing out for private circulation a manuscript journal as its organ. Regular lessons used to be given to educate the members in different subjects, and since emphasis was laid on moral and religious training it was but natural that ‘Gita’ classes should form a regular feature of the afternoon gatherings.

It will be easily realised that after the recent happenings, mentally I was not the same man as when I left home and comfort two years ago to find a guru for myself. The change came somewhat suddenly—like a storm—and turned everything upside down. But long before the storm broke, a silent change had been going on within me of which I was unconscious at the time. Firstly, I was being pulled in the direction of social service. Secondly, in spite of all my eccentricities, I was acquiring moral stamina. Consequently, when I was faced with a sudden crisis which put to the test my sense of social duty, I was not found wanting. Without a tremor I took my stand and gladly faced the consequences. Shyness and diffidence vanished into thin air.

What was I to do now? I could not continue my studies because I did not know where and when I would have to begin again. The expulsion being for an indefinite period amounted to a sentence for life, and there was no certainty that the University authorities would relent after a time and permit me to resume my studies. I sounded my parents as to whether they would send me abroad to study, but my father set his face against the
idea. He was definitely of opinion that I should have the blot on my escutcheon removed before I could think of going abroad. That meant taking my degree from the Calcutta University first.

I had therefore to hold my soul in patience till the University authorities would think of reconsidering their orders, and meanwhile I had to fill my time somehow. Putting my books aside, I took to social service with passionate zeal. In those days epidemics like cholera and smallpox were of frequent occurrence in Orissa. Most people were too poor to afford a doctor and, even when they could do so, there was the further difficulty of finding nurses. It would sometimes happen that if cholera broke out in a hostel or boarding-house, the inmates would clear off bag and baggage, leaving the victims to their fate. There is no reason to be surprised at this, because prior to the introduction of saline injection treatment following the researches of Leonard Rogers, cholera was a most fatal disease, and in addition highly contagious. Fortunately, there was a group among the students, consisting partly of my old friends, who would go out to different parts of the city and do voluntary nursing. I readily joined them. We concentrated on such fell diseases as cholera and smallpox, but our services were available for other diseases as well. We also did duty in the cholera ward of the local Civil Hospital, for there were no trained nurses there and nursing was left in the hands of ignorant and dirty sweepers. In spite of the dire lack of adequate nursing, the cholera mortality in the hospital was much lower than in the village we had visited two years ago with a box of homoeopathic medicine and under the leadership of a half-doctor. The fact is that saline injections worked like magic and, when they were administered at an early
state of the disease, there was eighty per cent chance of recovery.

Nursing cholera patients we enjoyed greatly, especially when we found that several patients were thereby saved from the jaws of death. But in the matter of taking precautions, I was criminally negligent. I never cared to disinfect my clothes when I returned home and, of course, I did not volunteer information to anybody as to where I had been. I wonder that during all the months that I had been doing nursing I did not carry infection to other people or get infected myself.

With cholera patients I never had a feeling of repulsion even when I had to handle soiled clothes, but I could not say the same of smallpox in an advanced stage of suppuration. It required all my strength of mind to force me to attend such a patient. However, as a schooling, this sort of voluntary work had its value and I did not shirk it.

Nursing brought in other allied problems. What about those who died in spite of doctoring and nursing? There was no association for taking charge of the dead bodies and cremating them in the proper manner. In the case of unclaimed bodies, the municipal sweepers would come and dispose of them as they liked. But who would relish the idea of having his body labelled as unclaimed after his death? The nurses, therefore, were often called upon to function as undertakers. According to the Indian custom we would have to carry the dead body ourselves to the cremation ground and perform the funeral rites. The problem was comparatively simple when the dead person had well-to-do relatives and only needed volunteers. But there were cases when there was no money available and we had to send the hat round for meeting the expenses of cremation. Apart
from cases which volunteers had nursed, there were other cases where outside physical help was needed to perform the funeral rites and we had to minister in such cases as well.

Interesting and useful though nursing was, it could not fill all my time. Moreover, nursing was but an expedient; it was not a permanent remedy for any of our national ills. In our group we had always criticised the Ramakrishna Mission for concentrating on hospitals and flood and famine relief and neglecting nation-building work of a permanent nature, and I had no desire to repeat their mistake. Consequently, I tried my hand at youth organisation. I got together a large number of youths and we started an organisation with different departments for their physical, intellectual, and moral advancement. This work went on pretty well while I was there. About this time I was brought face to face with the problem of untouchability. In a students' hostel which was one of our favourite haunts there was a Santal student called Majhi. The Santals are generally looked upon as an inferior caste, but the students who were broadminded did not mind that, and Majhi was welcomed as a boarder. Things went on all right for a time. One day a personal servant of one of the boarders somehow came to know that Majhi was a Santal and he tried to stir up trouble by calling upon the other servants to refuse to work in the hostel if Majhi did not leave. Fortunately nobody was in a mood to listen to his demand and the trouble was nipped in the bud. What struck me at the time was that the really higher castes, who could have objected, never so much as thought of the case of the Santal student—whereas the servant who himself belonged to a comparatively low caste appeared highly indignant.
Soon after this incident Majhi fell ill with typhoid and we made it a point to nurse him with extra care and consideration. In this, to my great surprise and joy, my mother joined me.

To fill the gaps in my time I went out on excursions with friends to different places of religious or historical interest. Life in the open with plenty of walking was good for the health and it gave opportunities for that intimate communion with other souls which is never possible within the four walls of a room. Moreover, it helped me to keep away from home where I had nothing particular to do, because individualistic Yoga had no longer any attraction for me and the study of textbooks did not interest me. I now tried an experiment in using our religious festivals for developing our group life. From the earliest times the important religious ceremonies have been festivals in which the whole of society participates. Take the Durga Poojah in a village in Bengal. Though the religious part of the Poojah lasts only five days, work in connection with it lasts several weeks. During this period practically every caste or profession in the village is needed for some work or other in connection with the Poojah. Thus, though the Poojah may be performed in one home, the whole village participates in the festivity and also profits financially from it. In my infancy in our village home a drama used to be staged at the end of the Poojah which the whole village would enjoy. During the last fifty years, owing to the gradual impoverishment of the country and migration from the villages, these religious festivals have been considerably reduced and in some cases have ceased altogether. This has affected the circulation of money within the village economy and on the social side has made life dull and drab.
There is another form of religious festivity in which the community participates even more directly. In such cases the Poojah is performed not in a home but in some public hall and the expenses are borne not by one family, but by the community. These festivals, called Baroari Poojah, have also been gradually going out of existence. So in 1917 we decided to organise such a Poojah. On the social side it was a great success and it was therefore repeated in the following years.

During this period, on the mental side I remember to have made a distinct progress in one respect, that of the practice of self-analysis. This is a practice which I have regularly indulged in ever since and have benefited greatly thereby. It consists in throwing a powerful searchlight on your own mind with a view to knowing yourself better. Usually before going to sleep or in the early morning I would spend some time over this. This analysis would be of two kinds—analysis of myself as I was at that time and analysis of my whole life. From the former I would get to know more about my hidden desires and impulses, ideals and aspirations. From the latter I would begin to comprehend my life better, to view it from the evolutionary standpoint, to understand how in the past I had been struggling to fulfil myself, to realise my errors of the past and thereby draw conclusions for the future.

I had not practised self-analysis long before I made two discoveries, both important for myself. Firstly, I knew very little about my own mind till then, that there were ignoble impulses within me which masqueraded

1 During the last ten years Baroari Poojah has once again become extremely popular in Calcutta. Physical display, exhibitions, etc. are organised in connection with these Poojahs.

2 I hit upon this method quite empirically in my effort to master my own mind. At that time I did not know anything about psycho-analysis.
under a more presentable exterior. Secondly, the moment I put my finger on something ignoble or unworthy within me, I half-conquered it. Weaknesses of the mind, unlike diseases of the body, flourished only when they were not detected. When they were found out, they had a tendency to take to their heels.¹

One of the immediate uses I made of self-analysis was in ridding myself of certain disturbing dreams. I had fought against such dreams in my earlier life with some measure of success, but as I gradually improved my method of analysis, I got even better results. The earliest dreams of an unpleasant character were those of snakes, wild animals, etc. In order to rid myself of snake-dreams, I would sit down at night before going to sleep and picture myself in a closed room full of poisonous snakes and repeat to myself—'I am not afraid of being bitten; I am not afraid of death'. While thinking hard in this way I would doze off to sleep. After I practised in this way for a few days I noticed a change. At first the snakes appeared in my dreams but without frightening me. Then they dropped off altogether. Dreams of other wild animals were similarly dealt with. Since then I have had no trouble at all.

About the time I was expelled from College I began to have dreams of house-searches and arrests. Undoubtedly they were a reflection of my subconscious thoughts and hidden anxieties. But a few days' exercise cured me altogether. I had only to picture to myself house-searches and arrests going on without disturbing me and to repeat to myself that I was not upset in any way. Another class of dreams which occasionally

¹ Later on when I took up the study of psychology I learnt that a mental conflict was cured immediately the sufferer understood its origin or cause through psycho-analysis.
disturbed me, though not to the same extent, was about examinations for which I was not prepared or in which I fared badly. To tackle such dreams I had to repeat to myself that I was fully prepared for the examination and was sure of doing well. I know of people who are troubled by such dreams till late in life, and sometimes get into an awful fright in their dreams. For such people a more prolonged exercise may be necessary, but relief is sure to come if they persist. If a particular class of dreams appears to be persistent, a closer analysis should be made of them with a view to discovering their composition.

The dreams most difficult to get rid of are those about sex. This is because sex is one of the most powerful instincts in man and because there is a periodicity in sex-urge which occasions such dreams at certain intervals. Nevertheless, it is possible to obtain at least partial relief. That, at any rate, has been my experience. The method would be to picture before the mind the particular form that excites one in his dreams and to repeat to himself that it does not excite him any longer—that he has conquered lust. For instance, if it is the case of a man being excited by a woman, the best course would be for him to picture that form before his mind as the form of his mother or sister. One is likely to get discouraged in his fight with sex-dreams unless he remembers that there is a periodicity in sex-urge which does not apply to other instincts and that the sex-instinct can be conquered or sublimated only gradually.

To continue our narrative, I returned to Calcutta after a year’s absence in order to try my luck with the University authorities once again. It was a difficult job, but the key to the situation was with Sir Asutosh Mukherji, the virtual dictator of the University. If he
willed it, the penal order could be withdrawn. While waiting for the matter to come up, I grew restless and looked out for a suitable outlet for my energy. Just then the campaign for recruitment to the 49th Bengalees was going on. I attended a recruiting meeting at the University Institute and felt greatly interested. The next day I quietly went to the office in Beadon Street where recruits were medically examined and offered myself for recruitment. Army medical examinations are always nasty and they show no consideration for any sense of shame. I went through it without flinching. I was sure that I would pass all the other tests, but I was nervous about my eyesight which was defective. I implored the L.M.S. officer, who happened to be an Indian, to pass me as fit, but he regretted that for an eye examination I would have to go to another officer. There is a saying in Bengali—'it gets dark just where there is a fear of a tiger appearing'—and so it happened in this case. This officer, one Major Cook I think, happened to be very particular about eye-sight and, though I had passed every other test, he disqualified me. Heartbroken I returned home.

I was informed that the University authorities would probably be amenable, but that I would have to find a College where I could be admitted if the University had no objection. The Bangabasi College offered to take me in, but there was no provision there for the honours course in philosophy. So I decided to approach the Scottish Church College. One fine morning without any introduction whatsoever I went straight to the Principal of that College, Dr Urquhart, and told him that I was an expelled student, but that the University was going to lift the ban, and I wanted to study for the honours course in philosophy in his College. He was
evidently favourably impressed, for he agreed to admit me, provided the Principal of the Presidency College did not stand in the way. I would have to get a note from him to the effect that he had no objection to my admission into the Scottish Church College. That was not an easy task for me. My second brother, Sjt. Sarat Chandra Bose, who was my guardian in Calcutta, however, offered to do this for me and he interviewed the new Principal.¹ Mr W., he told me, was quite tractable on this point but he wanted me to call on him once. I went and was put through a searching cross examination about the events of the previous year. At the end he wound up by saying he was concerned more with the future than the past and would not object to my going to some other institution. That was all that I wanted, I had no desire to go back to the Presidency College.

Once admitted, I took to my studies with zeal and devotion. I had lost two years and when I joined the third year class again in July, 1917, my class-mates had taken their B.A. and were studying for their M.A. degree. At College I led a quiet life. There was no possibility of any friction with the authorities with such a tactful and considerate man as Dr Urquhart as Principal. He was himself a philosophy man and lectured on that subject, besides giving Bible lessons. His Bible lessons were very interesting and, for the first time, the Bible did not bore me. It was such a welcome change from the Bible lessons in the P. E. School. Life was humdrum in College except for the fact that I took part in the activities of the College Societies, especially the Philosophical Society. But I soon found something to add some spice to my daily life.

The Government had agreed to start a University

¹ Mr W.
unit in the India Defence Force—India's Territorial Army—and recruiting was going on for this unit, a double company. The physical tests would not be so stiff as in the regular army tests, especially in the matter of vision. So there was a chance of my getting in. This experiment was being sponsored on the Indian side by the late Dr Suresh Chandra Sarvadhikari,¹ the famous Calcutta surgeon, whose zeal for providing military training for Bengalees was unbounded. I was not disappointed this time. Our training began at the Calcutta Maidan in mufti and the officers and instructors were provided by the Lincoln's Regiment in Fort William. It was a motley crowd that assembled there the first day to answer the roll-call. Some in dhoti (Bengalee style), some in shorts (semi-military style), some in trousers (civilian style), some bareheaded, some in turbans, some with hats, and so on. It did not look as if soldiers could be made out of them. But the entire aspect changed when two months later we shifted to the vicinity of the Fort, got into military uniform, pitched our tents, and began drilling with our rifles. We had camp life for four months and enjoyed it thoroughly. Part of it was spent at Belghurriah about twelve miles from Calcutta

¹ Dr Sarvadhikari, Dr S. K. Mullick (now dead) and some others were pioneers of the movement to persuade the Government to admit Bengalees into the Army. During the war, when the Government was hard up in the matter of man-power, they were successful. Bengalees were first allowed to join the Ambulance Corps and were sent to Mesopotamia. As they had a very good record there, they were admitted into the regular army and the 49th Bengalees was then started. Bengalees were also admitted into the Indian Territorial Force and the University Infantry was the university section of that force. The University Infantry is now a permanent corps but the Bengalee units in the regular army were disbanded at the end of the war. In 1916 I met a demobilised officer of the Bengal Ambulance Corps who had been present at the siege of Kut-el-Amara and thereafter was a prisoner of war in Turkey. I was greatly excited by his tales of adventure and wanted to join the army.
where we had our musketry practice at the rifle range. What a change it was from sitting at the feet of anchorites to obtain knowledge about God, to standing with a rifle on my shoulder taking orders from a British army officer!

We did not see any active service nor did we have any real adventure. Nevertheless we were enthusiastic over our camp-life. There is no doubt that it engendered real esprit de corps, though we had never experienced anything like military life before. Besides our parade we had recreation of all sorts—official and unofficial—and sports as well. Towards the end of our training we had mock-fights in the dark which were interesting and exciting to a degree. The company had its comic figures and many were the jokes we would have at their expense. At an early stage they were put in a separate squad, called the ‘Awkward Squad’. But as they improved, they were drafted into the regular platoons. Jack Johnson,¹ however, refused to change and till the last he stood out as a unique personality and had to be tolerated even by the Officer Commanding.

Our O.C., Captain Gray, was a character. He was a ranker, which meant much, considering the conservative traditions of the British Army. It would be difficult to find a better instructor than he. A rough Scotsman with a gruff voice, on the parade-ground he always wore a scowl on his face. But he had a heart of gold. He always meant well and his men knew it and therefore liked him, despite his brusque manners. For Captain Gray we will do anything—that is how we felt at the time. When he joined our Company, the staff officers in Fort William were of opinion that we would be utter failures as soldiers. Captain Gray showed that their

¹ That was his nickname.
estimate was wrong. The fact is that, being all educated men, we picked up very soon. What ordinary soldiers would take months to learn we would master in so many weeks. After three weeks' musketry training there was a shooting competition between our men and our instructors, and the latter were beaten hollow. Our instructors refused to believe at first that our men had never handled rifles before. I remember asking our platoon-instructor one day to tell me frankly what he thought of us as soldiers. He said that on parade we were quite smart but that our fighting stamina could be tested only during active service. Our O.C. was satisfied with our turn-out, at least he said so when we broke up, and he felt proud when the military secretary to the Governor complimented us on our parade, the day we furnished the guard-of-honour to His Excellency at the Calcutta University Convocation. His satisfaction was even greater when we did well at the Proclamation Parade on New Year's Day.

I wonder how much I must have changed from those days when I could find pleasure in soldiering. Not only was there no sign of maladaptation to my new environment but I found a positive pleasure in it. This training gave me something which I needed or which I lacked. The feeling of strength and of self-confidence grew still further. As soldiers we had certain rights which as Indians we did not possess. To us as Indians, Fort William was out of bounds, but as soldiers we had right of entry there, and as a matter of fact the first day we marched into Fort William to bring our rifles, we experienced a queer feeling of satisfaction, as if we were taking possession of something to which we had an inherent right but of which we had been unjustly deprived. The route-marches in the city and elsewhere
we enjoyed, probably because it gave us a sense of impor-
tance. We could snap our fingers at the police and
other agents of the Government by whom we were in
the habit of being harassed or terrorised.

The third year in College was given up to soldiering
and the excitement connected therewith. Only in my
fourth year¹ did I commence my studies in right earnest.
At the B.A. Examination in 1919 I did well, but not
up to my expectations. I got first-class honours
in philosophy but was placed second in order of merit.
For my M.A. course I did not want to continue philo-
sophy. As I have remarked before, I was to some extent
disillusioned about philosophy. While it developed the
critical faculty, provoked scepticism, and fostered intel-
lectual discipline, it did not solve any of the fundamental
problems for me. My problems could be solved only
by myself. Besides this consideration there was another
factor at work. I myself had changed considerably
during the last three years. I decided therefore to
study experimental psychology for my M.A. examina-
tion. It was a comparatively new science I found ab-
sorbing, but I was not destined to continue it for more
than a few months.

One evening, when my father was in Calcutta, he
suddenly sent for me. I found him closeted with my
second brother, Sarat. He asked me if I would like
to go to England to study for the Indian Civil Service.
If I agreed I should start as soon as possible. I was
given twenty-four hours to make up my mind.

It was an utter surprise to me. I took counsel with

¹ In the Indian Universities after the 1st and 2nd year comes the
Intermediate Examination. After the 3rd and 4th year comes the B.A. or
B.Sc. Examination and after the 5th and 6th year comes the M.A. or M.Sc.
Examination.
myself and, within a few hours, made up my mind to go. All my plans about researches in psychology were put aside. How often, I wondered, were my carefully laid plans going to be shattered by the superior force of circumstances. I was not so sorry to part company with psychology, but what about joining the Indian Civil Service and accepting a job under the British Government? I had not thought of that even in my dreams. I persuaded myself, however, that I could never pass the I.C.S. examination at such short notice, for by the time I reached England and settled down to study, barely eight months would be left and I had but one chance, in view of my age. If, however, I managed to get through, there would be plenty of time to consider what I should do.

I had to leave at a week’s notice. A berth was somehow secured in a boat going all the way by sea. But the difficulty was about my passport. There was one left to the tender mercies of the C.I.D., especially in a province like Bengal. And from the police point of view, my antecedents were certainly not irreproachable. Through the good offices of a high police official who was a distant relative of mine, I was introduced to police headquarters and within six days my passport was forthcoming. A marvel indeed!

Once again I had done things off my own bat. When I consulted the group regarding my proposed journey to England, they threw cold water on the project. One of the most promising members who had been to England had married and settled down there and did not think of returning. It was dangerous to try another experiment. But I was adamant. What did it matter if one member had gone astray? It did not follow that others would do the same, so I argued. My relations.
with the group had been growing increasingly lukewarm for some time past, and I had joined the University infantry without consulting them. But this was the limit. Though we did not say so, we felt that we had come to the parting of the ways, since I was determined to strike out a line for myself.

Then I visited the Provincial Advisor for studies in England, himself a product of Cambridge and a Professor of the Presidency College. He knew me by sight and naturally did not have a high opinion of an expelled student. As soon as he heard that I intended to sit for the I.C.S. examination the next year, he summoned up all his powers of dissuasion. I had no chance whatsoever against the ‘tip-toppers’ from Oxford and Cambridge; why was I going to throw away ten thousand rupees? That was the burden of his homily. Realising the force of his argument and unable to find an answer to his question, I simply said, “My father wants me to throw away the ten thousand rupees.” Then seeing that he would do nothing to help me secure admission to Cambridge, I left him.

Relying entirely on my own resources and determined to try my luck in England, I set sail on the 15th September, 1919.