

# Tales of Prison Life

Sri Aurobindo

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“Friday, May 1, 1908.... I did not know that that day would mean the end of a chapter of my life, and that there stretched before me a year’s imprisonment during which period all my human relations would cease, that for a whole year I would have to live, beyond the pale of society, like an animal in a cage. And when I would re-enter the world of activity it would not be the old familiar Aurobindo Ghose. Rather it would be a new being, a new character, intellect, life, mind, embarking upon a new course of action that would come out of the ashram at Alipore.” — *Tales of Prison Life* is Sri Aurobindo’s account of his experiences as an undertrial prisoner in Alipore Jail, Calcutta. Arrested for conspiracy in May 1908, Sri Aurobindo spent one full year in jail while the British Government, in a protracted trial, tried to implicate him in various revolutionary activities. Acquitted and released May, 1909, he wrote a series of articles in Bengali in the journal *Suprabhat* describing his life in prison and the courtroom.

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On Friday, May 1, 1908, I was sitting in the *Bande Mataram* office, when Shrijut Shyamsundar Chakravarty handed over a telegram from Muzaffarpur. On reading it I learned of a bomb outrage in which two European ladies had been killed. In that day’s issue of the “Empire” I read another news item that the Police Commissioner had said that he knew the people involved in the murder and that they would soon be put under arrest. At that time I had no idea that I happened to be the main target of suspicion and that according to the police I was the chief killer, the instigator and secret leader of the young terrorists and revolutionaries. I did not know that that day would mean the end of a chapter of my life, and that there stretched before me a year’s imprisonment during which period all my human relations would cease, that for a whole year I would have to live, beyond the pale of society, like an animal in a cage. And when I would re-enter the world of activity it would not be the old familiar Aurobindo Ghose. Rather it would be a new being, a new character, intellect, life, mind, embarking upon a new course of action that would come out of the ashram at Alipore.

I have spoken of a year’s imprisonment. It would have been more appropriate to speak of a year’s living in a forest, in an ashram or hermitage. For long I had made great efforts for a direct vision (*sakshat darshan*) of the Lord of my Heart; had entertained the immense hope of knowing the Preserver of the world, the Supreme Person (*Purushottam*) as friend and master. But due to the pull of a thousand worldly desires, attachment towards numerous activities and the deep darkness of ignorance I did not

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succeed in that effort. At long last the most merciful all-good Lord (*Shiv Hari*) destroyed all these enemies at one stroke and helped me in my path, pointed to the *yogashram*, Himself staying as guru and companion in my little abode of retirement and spiritual discipline.

The British prison was that ashram. I have also watched this strange contradiction in my life that however much good my well-intentioned friends might do for me, it is those who have harmed me—whom shall I call an enemy, since enemy I have none?—my opponents have helped me even more. They wanted to do me an ill turn, the result was I got what I wanted. The only result of the wrath of the British Government was that I found God.

It is not the aim of these essays to provide an intimate journal of my life in the prison. I wish to mention only a few external details, but I have thought it better to mention, at least once, in the beginning, the main theme of the prison life. Else readers may think that suffering is the only fact of prison life. I can't say there were no inconveniences, but on the whole the time passed quite happily.



On Friday night I was sleeping without a worry. At about five in the morning my sister rushed to my room in an agitated manner and called me out by name. I got up. The next moment the small room was filled with armed policemen; Superintendent Cregan, Mr. Clark of 24-Parganas, the charming and delightful visage of familiar Sriman Benod Kumar Gupta, a few Inspectors, red turbans, spies and search witnesses. They all came running like heroes, pistols in hand, as though they were besieging, with guns and cannon, a well-armed fort.... I asked for the search warrant, read and signed it. Finding a mention of bombs in the warrant I understood that the presence of these soldiers and policemen was connected with the Muzaffarpur killing....

Cregan asked me: "It seems you are a B.A. Is it not a matter of shame for an educated person like you to be sleeping on the floor of an unfurnished room and in a house like this?" "I am a poor man, and I live like one," I said. "Then have you worked up all this mischief with the idea of becoming a rich man?" Cregan replied in a loud voice. Knowing how impossible it was to explain the love of motherland, sacrifice or the sublimity of a vow of poverty to this thick-skulled Briton I did not make the attempt.

All the while the search continued. Beginning at five-thirty, it was over at about eleven-thirty. Inside or outside the boxes, all the exercise books, letters, papers, scraps, poems, plays, prose, essays, translations, nothing escaped the clutches of the all-engrossing search. Among the witnesses to the search Mr. Rakshit seemed a little put out; later, bemoaning his lot, he informed me that the police had dragged him along, and that he had no idea that he would have to be a party to such a nefarious activity. He described, most pathetically, how he had been kidnapped for the purpose. The attitude of the other witness, Samarnath, was of quite another kind; he discharged his part of the job with considerable gusto, like a true loyalist and to the manner born. Nothing remarkable transpired in the course of the search.

But I recollect Mr. Clark looking long and suspiciously at the sacred earth from Dakshineswar that had been kept in a small cardboard box; he suspected it might be some new and terribly powerful explosive. In a sense Mr. Clark's suspicions were not unfounded. In the end the decision was reached that it was a piece of earth which it was unnecessary to send to the chemical analyst.

I did not join in the search except to open a few boxes. No papers or letters were shown or read out to me. Mr. Cregan, for his own delectation, read out loudly a letter from Alakdhari. The friendly Benod Gupta in his natural and delightful style marched round the room, raising echoes everywhere and brought out from the shelf or some other corner papers or letters, and now and then, muttering "Very important, very important" handed these over to Cregan. I was never told what these important documents might be. Nor was I at all curious, since I knew it was impossible that there might be in my house any formula for the manufacture of explosives or documents relating to conspiracy. After rummaging through my room the police led us to the adjoining room. Cregan opened a box belonging to my youngest aunt, he once or twice glanced at the letters, then saying that it was no use carrying these women's correspondence, left them behind.

Then the police *mahatmas* appeared on the ground floor. Cregan had his tea there. I had a cup of cocoa and toast. During this period Cregan tried to argue and convince me about his political views—this mental torture I had to suffer coolly. But may I ask, one knows physical tortures to be part of the traditional police strategy, but does such inhuman mental torture also fall within the purview of its unwritten law? I hope our highly respectable, friend-of-the-country Srijut Jogeshchandra Ghose will raise this question in the Legislative Assembly....

At about eleven-thirty we left our house. Outside the gates, in a car, I found my maternal uncle and Srijut Bhupendranath Basu. "On what charges have you been arrested?" asked uncle. "I know nothing," I answered, "they arrested and handcuffed me soon after getting into my room; they didn't show any body warrant." When uncle inquired why the handcuffs were thought necessary, Benodbabu said, "Sir, it's not my fault. Ask Aurobindababu, I told the sahib and had the handcuffs removed."... Later on I came to know that my solicitor, Sri Hirendranath Datta, had expressed a desire to be present on my behalf during the search. The police had turned down the request.

Benodbabu was entrusted with taking us to the police station. There he behaved with us in a remarkably decent manner. We had our bath and lunch there and then proceeded towards Lal Bazar. After being made to wait there for a couple of hours we were removed to Royd Street, in which auspicious locality we stayed all evening. It was there that I first came to know the sly detective Maulvi Samsul-Alam and had the pleasure of entering with him into a cordial relation. Till then the great Maulvi had not acquired either enough influence or energy, he was not yet the chief researcher in the bomb outrage or functioning as Mr. Norton's prompter and unfailing *aide-memoire*. Till that time Ramsadayababu was acting as the chief protagonist.

The Maulvi made me listen to a most entertaining sermon on religion.... I was charmed and delighted with his knowledge, intelligence and religious fervour. Thinking that it

would be impertinent to speak much I listened politely to his priceless sermon and cherished it in my heart. But in spite of so much religious enthusiasm the Maulvi did not give up his profession of a "tec." Once he said: "You made a great mistake in handing over the garden to your younger brother to manufacture bombs. It was not very intelligent on your part." Understanding the implication of his words I smiled a little, and said: "Sir, the garden is as much mine as my brother's. Where did you learn that I had given it up to him, or given it up to him for the purpose of manufacturing bombs?" A little abashed, the Maulvi answered: "No, no, I was saying in case you have done it." Then the great-souled Maulvi opened a chapter of his life before me, and said, "All the moral or economic progress that I have made in life can be traced back to a single sufficing moral adage of my father. He would always say, never give up an immediate gain. This great word is the sacred formula of my life, all this advancement is owing to the fact that I have always remembered that sage advice." At the time of this pronouncement the Maulvi stared at me so closely that it seemed as though I was his meat and food, which, following the parental advice, he would be loath to give up.

In the evening, the redoubtable Ramasadaya Mukhopadhyaya appeared on the scene. He expressed words of unusual kindness and sympathy, told everyone present to be careful about my food and bed. Immediately afterwards some fellows came and took Sailendra and me, through rain and storm, to the lock-up at Lal Bazar. This was the only occasion when I met Ramasadaya. I could see the man was both intelligent and active, but his words and demeanour, his tone, his gait, all seemed fake and unnatural, as if he was forever acting on a stage. There are men like that whose words, bodies, efforts are an embodiment of untruth. They are expert in imposing on immature minds, but those who know men and their ways, find them out at once. At Lal Bazar on the ground floor in a spacious room we two were kept together. Some snacks were served. After a while two Englishmen entered the room, later I was told that one of them was the Police Commissioner, Mr. Halliday himself. Finding us both together Halliday was wrathful with the sergeant, and pointing towards me he said, "Take care that nobody stays or speaks with this man." Sailen was at once removed and locked up in another room. When others had left, Halliday asked me: "Aren't you ashamed for being involved in this cowardly, dastardly activity?" "What right have you to assume that I was involved?" To this Halliday replied: "I am not assuming, I know everything." At this I said: "What you know or do not know is your concern. I wholly deny having any connection with these murderous acts."

That night I had other visitors, all members of the police force. There was a mystery behind the visit, which till now I have failed to fathom. A month and a half before my arrest an unknown gentleman came to see me. He said: "Sir, we have not met, but since I have great respect for you I have come to warn you of an impending danger, I would also like to know if you are familiar with anyone at Konnagar. Did you ever visit the place, and do you have a house there?" "No, I do not have any house there," I said. "But I have been there once and am known to some people there." "I will say nothing more," said the stranger, "but now on you should not meet anyone from there. Some wicked people are conspiring against you and your brother, Barindra. Soon they will put you into trouble. Don't ask me anything more." I told him: "Gentleman, I am unable to

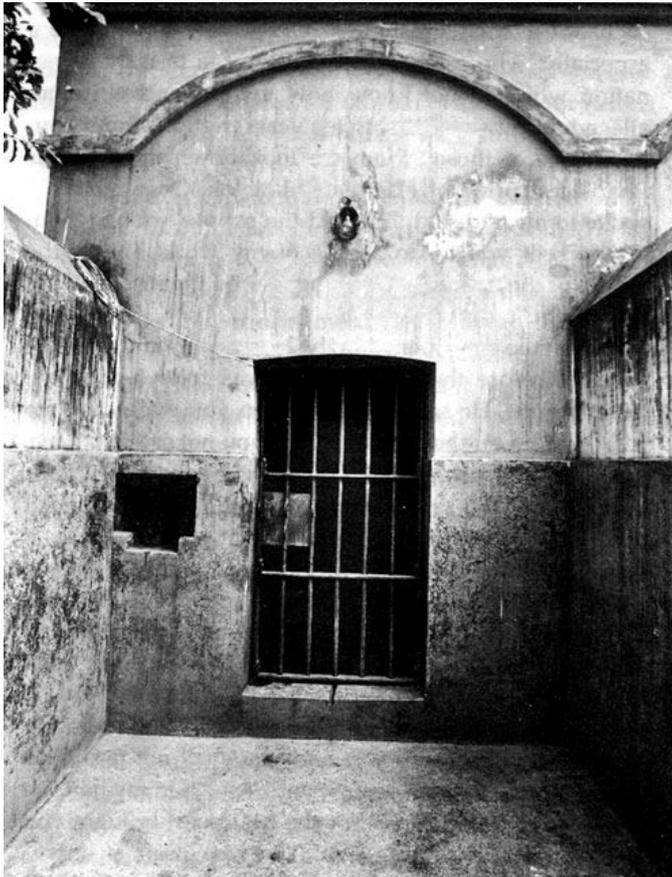
understand how this incomplete information will help me, but since you came with friendly intentions, thank you for coming. I do not wish to know anything more. I have complete faith in God, He will always protect me, and it is for me needless to make any attempt or be careful." I heard nothing about this afterward. That this stranger and well-wisher did not imagine things, I had proof the same night. An inspector and a few police officers came to pump out my connection with Konnagar. "Is your original home at Konnagar?" they asked. "Did you ever visit the place? When? And Why? Has Barindra any properties there?" – and other questions. I answered these questions in order to get at the root of these. The attempt was not a success, but from the questions as well as the manner of the police inquiry it appeared that they had come by some information which they were trying to verify. I guessed just as in the Tai-Maharaj case there had been an attempt to prove Tilak as a hypocrite, liar, cheat and tyrant in which the Bombay Government had joined hands and wasted public money,— similarly there were people interested in putting me into trouble.

The whole of Sunday was passed in the lock-up. There was a staircase in front of my room. In the morning I found a few young lads coming down the stairs. Their faces were unfamiliar, but I guessed that they too had been arrested in the same case. Later I came to know that these were the lads from the Manicktola Gardens. A month after in the jail I came to know them. A little later I too was taken downstairs for a wash — since there was no arrangement for a bath, I went without it. For lunch I grabbed, with some effort, a few morsels of pulse and boiled rice, the effort proved too much and had to be given up. In the afternoon we had fried rice. For three days this was our diet. But I must also add that on Monday the sergeant, of himself, gave me tea and toast. Later I came to learn that my lawyer had sought permission from the Commissioner to have my food sent from home, but to this, Mr. Halliday did not agree. I also heard that the accused were forbidden to consult their lawyer or attorney. I don't know if this restriction is valid or not. It is true that though a lawyer's advice would have been of help to me, I didn't quite need it; it has however, harmed some others involved in the case.

On Monday we were presented before the Commissioner. Abinash and Sainen were with me. We were taken in different batches. Thanks to our good deeds in our past incarnation we three had been arrested earlier, and, since we had already some experience of legal quibblings, all of us refused to make any declarations before the Commissioner. Next day we were taken to the court of the magistrate, Mr. Thornhill. It was then that I met for the first time Shrijut Kumar Krishna Datta, Mr. Manuel, and one of my relations. Mr. Manuel asked me, "According to the police a good deal of suspicious literature has been recovered from your house. Were these papers or letters really there?" "I can say without a shadow of doubt," I told him, "that there were no such things, it is quite impossible." Of course then I did not know of the "sweets letter" or of the "scribblings." I told my relative: "Tell the people at home not to fear or worry, my innocence will be fully vindicated." From that period I had a firm belief that it would be so.

In the beginning, during solitary imprisonment, the mind was a little uneasy. But after three days of prayer and meditation an unshakable peace and faith again overwhelmed the being. From Mr. Thornhill's court we were taken in a carriage to Alipore. The group included Nirapada, Dindayal, Hemchandra Das, and others. Of these I knew Hemchandra Das; once I put up at his place in Midnapore. Who could have known then that I would meet him like this, as a prisoner on the way to the jail? We were detained for a little while at the Alipore magistrate's court, but we were not presented before the magistrate; they went in only to get an order signed. We again got into the carriage, when a gentleman came near me and said, "I have heard that they are planning solitary confinement for you and orders are being passed to that effect. Probably they will not allow anyone to see or meet you. If you wish to convey any information to your people, I shall do that." I thanked him, but since what I wished to convey I had already done through my relative, I did not tell him anything more. I am mentioning this fact as an example of my countrymen's sympathy and unsought kindness towards me.

Thereafter from the court we went to the jail, and were surrendered to its officers. Before entering the jail precincts we were given a bath, put into prison uniform, while our clothes, shirts, dhotis and *kurtas* were taken away for laundry. The bath, after four days, was a heavenly bliss. After that they took us to our respective cells. I went into mine and the doors were closed as soon as I got in. My prison life at Alipore began on May 5. Next year, on May 6, I was released.



My solitary cell was nine feet long and five or six feet in width; it had no windows, in front stood strong iron bars, this cage was my appointed abode. Outside was a small court-yard, with stony grounds, a high brick wall with a small wooden door. On top of that door, at eye level, there was a small hole or opening. After the door had been bolted the sentry, from time to time, peeped through it to find out what the convict was doing. But my courtyard door remained open for most of the time. There were six contiguous rooms like that, in prison parlance these were known as the "six decrees." "De-



crees” stood for rooms for special punishment — those who are condemned to solitary imprisonment by the orders of either the judge or the jail superintendent have to stay in these mini-caves.

Even in such solitary confinement there is the rule of caste or hierarchy. Those who are heavily punished have their courtyard doors permanently closed; deprived of contacts with the rest of the human world their only point of relation with the outside world is restricted to the vigilant eyes of the sentry and the fellow-convict who brings his food twice a day. Since Hemchandra Das was looked upon as being a greater terror for the criminal investigation department than I, he had been given this strict regimen. But in the solitary cell too there are refinements — handcuffs and iron rings round one’s hand and foot. This highest punishment is meted out not only for disturbing the peace of the prison or playing rough but also if one is found frequently slack in prison labour. To harass those convicted in cases of solitary confinement is against the spirit of law, but the Swadeshi or “Bande Mataram” convicts were beyond the pale and according as the police desired benign arrangements were made for these.

Such was the place where we were lodged. As for fittings our generous authorities had left nothing to be desired so far as our hospitable reception was concerned. One plate and bowl used to adorn the courtyard. Properly washed and cleansed my self-sufficing plate and bowl shone like silver, it was the solace of my life. In its impeccable, glowing radiance in the “heavenly kingdom,” in that symbol of immaculate British imperialism, I used to enjoy the pure bliss of loyalty to the Crown. Unfortunately the plate too shared in the bliss, and if one pressed one’s fingers a little hard on its surface it would

start flying in a circle, like the whirling dervishes of Arabia. And then one had to use one hand for eating while the other held the plate in position. Else, while whirling, it would attempt to slip away with the incomparable grub provided by the prison authorities.

But more dear and useful than the plate was the bowl. Among inert objects it was like the British civilian. Just as the civilian, *ipso facto*, is fit and able to undertake any administrative duty, be it as judge, magistrate, police, revenue officer, chairman of municipality, professor, preacher, whatever you ask him to do he can become at your merest saying,— just as for him to be an investigator, complainant, police magistrate, even at times to be the counsel for defence, all these roles hold a friendly concourse in the same hospitable body,— my dear bowl was equally multipurpose. The bowl was free from all caste restrictions, beyond discrimination, in the prison cell it helped in the act of ablution, later with the same bowl I gargled, bathed, a little later when I had to take my food, lentil soup or vegetable was poured into the same container, I drank water out of it and washed my mouth. Such an all — purpose priceless object can be had only in a British prison.

Serving all my worldly needs the bowl became an aid in my spiritual discipline too. Where else could I find such an aid and preceptor to get rid of the sense of disgust? After the first spell of solitary imprisonment was over, when we were allowed to stay together, my civilian's rights were bifurcated, and the authorities arranged for another receptacle, for the privy. But for one month I acquired an unsought lesson in controlling my disgust. The entire procedure for defecation seems to have been oriented towards the art of self-control. Solitary imprisonment, it has been said, must be counted among a special form of punishment and its guiding principle the avoidance of human company and the open sky. To arrange this ablution in the open or outside would mean a violation of the principle, hence two baskets, with tar coating, would be kept in the room itself. The sweeper, *mehtar*, would clean it up in the morning and afternoons. In case of intense agitation and heart-warming speeches from our side the cleaning would be done at other times too. But if one went to the privy at odd hours as penance one had to put up with the noxious and fetid smell. In the second chapter of our solitary confinement there were some reforms in this respect, but British reforms keep the old principles intact while making minor changes in administration. Needless to say, because of all this arrangement, in a small room, one had throughout to undergo considerable inconvenience, especially at meal times and during night. Attached bath-rooms are, I know, often times a part of western culture, but to have in a small cell a bedroom, dining room and w.c. rolled into one — that is what is called too much of a good thing!

We Indians are full of regrettable customs, it is painful for us to be so highly civilised. Among household utilities there were also a small bucket, a tin water container and two prison blankets. The small bucket would be kept in the courtyard, where I used to have my bath. In the beginning I did not suffer from water scarcity, though that happened later on. At first the convict in the neighbouring cowshed would supply water as and when I wanted it, hence during the bathing recess amidst the austerities

of prison life I enjoyed every day a few moments of the householder's luxury and love of pleasure. The other convicts were not so fortunate, the same tub or pail did for the w.c., cleaning of utensils and bath.... According to the British the love of God and physical well-being are almost equal and rare virtues, whether the prison regulations were made in order to prove the point of such a proverb or to prevent the unwilling austerity of the convicts spoiled by excessive bathing facilities, it was not easy to decide. This liberality of the authorities was made light of by the convicts as "crow bathing." Men are by nature discontented.

The arrangements for drinking water were even better than the bathing facilities. It was then hot summer, in my little room the wind was almost forbidden to enter. But the fierce and blazing sunlight of May had free access to it. The entire room would burn like a hot oven. While being locked thus the only way to lessen one's irresistible thirst was the tepid water in the small tin enclosure. I would drink that water often, but this would not quench the thirst, rather there would be heavy sweating and soon after the thirst would be renewed. But one or two had earthen pots placed in their courtyard, for which, remembering the austerities of a past incarnation, they would count themselves lucky. This compelled even the strongest believers in personal effort to admit the role of fate; some had cold water, some remained thirsty forever, it was as the stars decreed. But in their distribution of tin-cans or water-pots, the authorities acted with complete impartiality. Whether I was pleased or not with such erratic arrangements the generous jail doctor found my water trouble unbearable. He made efforts to get an earthen pot for my use, but since the distribution was not in his hands he did not succeed for long, at last at his bidding the head sweeper managed to discover an earthen pot from somewhere.

Before that in the course of my long battle with thirst I had achieved a thirst-free state. In this blazing room two prison blankets served for my bed. There was no pillow, I would spread one of these as mattress and fold the other as a pillow, and I slept like that. When the heat became unbearable I would roll on the ground and enjoy it. Then did I know the joy of the cool touch of Mother Earth. But the floor's contact in the prison was not always pleasing, it prevented the coming of sleep and so I had to take recourse to the blanket. The days on which it rained were particularly delightful. But there was this difficulty that during rain and thunder, thanks to the *danse macabre* (*tandava nritya*) of the strong wind, full of dust, leaf and grass, a small-scale flood would take place inside my little room. After which there was no alternative but to rush to a corner with a wet blanket. Even after this game of nature was over, till the earth dried one had to seek refuge in reflection leaving aside all hope of sleep. The only dry areas were near the w.c., but one did not feel like placing the blankets near that area. But in spite of such difficulties on windy days a lot of air also blew in and since that took away the furnace-like heat of the room I welcomed the storm and the shower.

This description of the Alipore government hotel which I have given here, and will give still more later, is not for the purpose of advertising my own hardship; it is only to show what strange arrangements are made for undertrial prisoners in the civilised British Raj, what prolonged agony for the innocent. The causes of hardship that I have

described were no doubt there, but since my faith in divine mercy was strong I had to suffer only for the first few days; thereafter — by what means I shall mention later — the mind had transcended these sufferings and grown incapable of feeling any hardship. That is why when I recollect my prison life instead of anger or sorrow I feel like laughing. When first of all I had to go into my cage dressed in strange prison uniform, and notice the arrangements for our stay, this is what I felt. And I laughed within myself. Having studied the history of the English people and their recent doings I had already found out their strange and mysterious character. So I was not at all astonished or unhappy at their behaviour towards me.

Normally this kind of behaviour towards us would be for them extremely illiberal and blameworthy. We all came from gentlemanly stock, many were scions of landlords, some were, in terms of their family, education, quality and character, the equals of the highest classes in England. The charge on which we had been arrested, that too was not ordinary murder, theft or dacoity; it was an attempt at insurrection to liberate the country from foreign rulers or conspiracy towards armed conflict. The main cause of detention was suspicion on the part of the police, though even there in many instances the proof of guilt was wholly wanting. In such cases to be herded together like ordinary thieves and dacoits — and not even as thieves and dacoits, to keep them like animals in a cage, to give them food unfit for animals, to make them endure water scarcity, thirst and hunger, sun, rain and cold, all these do not enhance the glory of the British race and its imperial officers. This is, however, a national defect of their character. The English are possessed of the qualities of the Kshatriya, but in dealing with enemies or opponents they are cent per cent businesslike. But, at the time, I was not annoyed at this. On the contrary, I had felt a little happy that no discrimination had been made between the common uneducated masses and myself.

Moreover, this arrangement added fuel to the flame of my adoration of the Mother (*matribhakti*). I took it as a marvellous means and favourable condition for learning yoga and rising above conflicts. I was one of the extremists, in whose view democracy and equality between the rich and the poor formed a chief ingredient of nationalism. I remembered that, thinking it our duty to turn the theory into practice, we had travelled together, on our way to Surat, in the same third class, in the camp the leaders instead of making separate arrangements would sleep in the same room along with the others. Rich, poor, Brahmins, businessmen, Shudra, Bengali, Maratha, Punjabi, Gujarati, we all stayed, slept, ate together in a wonderful feeling of brotherhood. We slept on the ground, ate the normal fare, made of rice-pulse curd, in every way it was superlatively *swadesi*. The “foreign-returned” from Bombay and Calcutta and the Brahmin-born Madrassi with his *tilak* (head-mark) had become one body. During my stay in the Alipore Jail I ate, lived, went through the same hardship and enjoyed the same privileges with the other convicts, my fellow nationals, the peasants, iron-monger, potter, the *doms* and the *bagdis*, and I could learn that the Lord who dwells in every body, this socialism and unity, this nation-wide brotherhood had put its stamp on my life’s dedication (*jivan brata*)....

The other day I noticed that the *Indian Social Reformer*, from Poona, has ironically commented on one of my simple easy-to-understand statements by remarking: “We find an excess of Godwardness in the prison!” Alas for the pride and littleness of men, seeking after renown, of little learning, proud of their little virtues! The manifestation of God, should it not be in prison, in huts, ashrams, in the heart of the poor, but rather in the temples of luxury of the rich or the bed of repose of pleasure-seeking selfish worldly folk? God does not look for learning, honour, leadership, popular acclaim, outward ease and sophistication. To the poor He reveals Himself in the form of the Compassionate Mother. He who sees the Lord in all men, in all nations, in his own land, in the miserable, the poor, the fallen and the sinner and offers his life in the service of the Lord, the Lord comes to such hearts. So it is that in a fallen nation ready to rise, in the solitary prison of the servant of the nation the nearness of God grows.

After the jailor had seen to the blankets and the plates and bowl and left, I began to watch, sitting on the blanket, the scene before me. This solitary confinement seemed to me much better than the lock-up at Lal Bazar. There the silence of the commodious hall with an opportunity to extend its huge body, seems to deepen the silence. Here the walls of the room seemed to come closer, eager to embrace one, like the all-pervading Brahman. There one cannot even look at the sky through the high windows of the second storey room, it becomes hard to imagine that there are in this world trees and plants, men, animals, birds and houses. Here, since the door to the courtyard remains open, by sitting near the bars one could see the open spaces and the movement of the prisoners. Alongside the courtyard wall stood a tree, its green foliage a sight for sore eyes. The sentry that used to parade before the six “six decree” rooms, his face and footsteps often appeared dear like the welcome steps of a friend. The prisoners in the neighbouring cowshed would take out in front of the room the cows for grazing. Both cow and cowherd were daily and delightful sights.

The solitary confinement at Alipore was a unique lesson in love. Before coming here even in society my affections were confined to a rather narrow circle, and the closed emotions would rarely include birds and animals. I remember a poem by Rabibabu in which is described, beautifully, a village boy’s deep love for a buffalo. I did not at all understand it when I read it first, I had felt a note of exaggeration and artificiality in that description. Had I read that poem now, I would have seen it with other eyes. At Alipore I could feel how deep could be the love of man for all created things, how thrilled a man could be on seeing a cow, a bird, even an ant. The first day in prison passed off peacefully. It was all so new that it was almost gay. Comparing it with the Lal Bazar lock-up I felt happy with my present circumstances, and since I had faith in God the loneliness did not weigh heavily on me.

Even the strange spectacle of prison diet failed to disturb my attitude. Coarse rice, even that spiced with husk, pebbles, insects, hair, dirt and such other stuff — the tasteless lentil soup was heavily watered, among vegetables and greens mixed with grass and leaves. I never knew before that food could be so tasteless and without any nutritive value. Looking at its melancholy black visage I was struck with fear, and after two mouthfuls with a respectful *salaam* I took leave of it. All prisoners receive the same diet,

and once a course gets going it goes on forever. Then it was the Reign of Herbs. Days, fortnights and months pass by, but the same herbs, or *Shak*, lentils and rice went on unchanged. What to speak of changing the menu, the preparation was not changed a jot or tittle, it was the same immutable, eternal from beginning to end, a stable, unique thing-in-itself. Within two evenings it was calculated to impress the prisoner with the fragility of this world of *maya*.

But even here I was luckier than the other prisoners because of the doctor's kindness. He had arranged supply of milk from the hospital, thanks to which I had been spared on certain days from the vision of *Shak*. That night I went to bed early, but it was no part of the prison regulations to be allowed to enjoy undisturbed sleep, since this might encourage a love of luxury among the prisoners. Hence there is a rule that every time sentries are changed, the prisoner has to be noisily disturbed and till he responds to their cries there is no respite. Among those who were engaged in this kind of patrolling the "six decree" cells there were a few who would be no doubt remiss in their duty in this respect — among the police there was as a rule more of kindness and sympathy than strict sense of responsibility — this was especially so with the Hindustani policemen. Some of course remained obstinate. Waking us up at odd hours they would inquire about our well-being thus: "How do you do, Sir?" This untimely humour was not always pleasant or welcome, but I could see that those who were behaving like this were but carrying out orders. For a few days in spite of the annoyance I put up with this. In the end to preserve my sleep I had to scold them. After repeating this process for a few times I noticed that this custom of seeking news about my well-being stopped of itself.

Next morning at four-fifteen the prison bell rang, this was the first bell to wake up the prisoners. There is a bell again after sometime, when the prisoners have to come out in file, after washing they have to swallow the prison gruel (*lufsi*) before starting the day's work. Knowing that it was impossible to sleep with the bells ringing every now and then, I also got up. The bars were removed at five, and after washing I sat inside the room once again. A little later *lufsi* was served at my doorstep, that day I did not take it but had only a vision of what it looked like. It was after a few days that I had the first taste of the "great dish." *Lufsi*, boiled rice, along with water, is the prisoner's little breakfast. A trinity, it takes three forms. On the first day it was *Lufsi* in its Wisdom aspect, unmixed original element, pure, white, *Shiva*. On the second, it was the Hiranyagarbha aspect, boiled along with lentils, called kedgerree, yellowish, a medley. On the third day *lufsi* appeared in its aspect of Virat, a little mixed with jaggery, grey, slightly fit for human consumption. I had thought the Wisdom and the Hiranyagarbha aspects to be beyond the capacity of average humanity and therefore made no efforts in that direction, but once in a while I had forced some of the Virat stuff within my system and marvelled, in delightful muse, about the many-splendoured virtues of British rule and the high level of western humanitarianism. It should be added that *lufsi* was the only nutritious diet for the Bengali prisoners, the rest were without any food value. But what of that? It had a taste, and one could eat this only out of sheer hunger, even then, one had to force and argue with oneself to be able to consume that stuff.

That day I took my bath at half past eleven. For the first four or five days I had to keep wearing the clothes in which I had come from home. At the time of bathing the old prisoner-warder from the cowshed, who had been appointed to look after me, managed to procure a piece of *endi*, a yard and half long, and till my only clothes did not dry I had to keep wearing this. I did not have to wash my clothes or dishes, a prisoner in the cowshed would do that for me. Lunch was at eleven. To avoid the neighbourhood of the "basket," and braving the summer heat I would often eat in the courtyard. The sentries did not object to this. The evening meal would be between five and five-thirty. Then on the door was not permitted to be opened. At seven rang the evening bell. The chief supervisor gathered the prisoner-warders together and loudly called out the names of the inmates, after which they would return to their respective posts. The tired prisoner then takes the refuge of sleep and in that has his only pleasure. It is the time when the weak of heart weeps over his misfortune or in anticipation of the hardships of prison life. The lover of God feels the nearness of his deity, and has the joy of his prayer or meditation in the silent night. Then to these three thousand creatures who came from God, victims off a miserable social system, the huge instrument of torture, the Alipore Jail, is lost in a vast silence.



I would rarely meet the co-accused. They had been kept elsewhere. Behind the "six decrees" there were two rows of cells, forty-four in all, the reason why it was known as forty-four decrees. Most of the accused were placed in one of these lines. Confined to the cells as they were, they did not suffer from solitary imprisonment, since there were three in each room. On the other side of the prison there was another decree, with a few large rooms, these could accommodate even up to twelve persons. Those who were fortunate enough to be placed in this decree lived more happily. Many were confined to a room in this decree, with leisure to talk day and night and spend their time happily in human companionship. But there was one who was deprived of this pleasure. This was Hemchandra Das. I do not know why the authorities were especially afraid or angry with him, out of so many people he had been singled out for solitary confinement. Hemchandra himself believed that since, in spite of much effort, the police had failed to make him admit his guilt explained their wrath. He was confined to a small room in the decree of which even the door would be closed from outside. I have said that this was the extreme form of this type of punishment. From time to time the police would bring forward witnesses of different kind, colour and shape and enact the farce of an identification parade. On these occasions we would be made to line up, a long row, in front of the office. The prison authorities would mix up those accused on other charges along with us. But this was only in name. For among these other accused there was none that was either educated or from gentlemanly stock, and when we stood by their side there was such obvious disparity between the two types of accused, on the one hand the sharp, intelligent features of those accused in the bomb conspiracy, on the other hand, the soiled dress and lustreless visage of the average accused, that if looking at them one could not make out the difference, that could only mean that one was a big fool, bereft of the lowest human intelligence.

The prisoners were not however averse to the identification parade. It brought a kind of variety in prison life and provided a chance to exchange a-few words. After our arrest it was during one of the parades that I could first meet my brother, Barindra, though we did not speak at that time. It was Narendranath Goswami who would often stand by my side, so I had a little more exchange with him. Extremely handsome, tall, strong, plump, but his eyes spoke of evil propensities, nor did his words reveal any signs of intelligence. In this respect he was quite different from the other young people. On their lips were often expressed high and pure ideas and their speech showed keen intelligence, a love of knowledge and noble selfless aspirations. For though Gossain's words were those of a fool and a light-hearted person, they expressed vigour and boldness. At that time he fully believed that he would be acquitted. He would say: "My father is an expert in litigations, the police can never beat him. My evidence too will not go against me, for it will be proved that the police had got those statements by torturing me." I asked him, "You had been with the police. Where are your witnesses?" Gossain answered unabashed: "My father has conducted hundreds of cases, he knows all this very well. There will be no lack of witnesses." Of such stuff are approvers made.

Earlier we have referred to many of the needless sufferings and difficulties of the accused, but it should also be added that these were all part of prison administration; the sufferings were not due to any one's personal cruelty or lack of human qualities. Indeed, the persons on whom rested the administration of the Alipore Jail, they were all of them exceedingly polite, kindly and conscientious. If in any prison the prisoner's suffering has been lessened, the inhuman barbarity of the western prison lightened through kindness and conscientiousness, then that good out of evil has happened in the Alipore Jail under Mr. Emerson. This has happened due to two main reasons: the extraordinary qualities of its Superintendent, Mr. Emerson, and the assistant doctor, Baidyanath Chatterji. One of them was an embodiment of Europe's nearly vanished Christian ideals, the other was a personification of the charity and philanthropy that form the essence of Hinduism. Men like Mr. Emerson do not come to this country often, they are getting rarer even in the West. In him could be found all the virtues of a Christian gentleman. Peace-loving, just, incomparably generous, full of rectitude, simple, straight and disciplined even towards inferiors, he was by nature incapable of anything but polite conduct. Among his shortcomings were lack of energy and administrative efficiency, he would leave all the responsibility on the jailor, himself remaining a *roi faineant*.

I do not think this caused much harm. The jailor, Jogendrababu, was a capable and efficient person, in spite of being seriously handicapped by diabetes he would himself look after all the activities and since he was familiar with the boss's nature, he would respect justice and the absence of cruelty in the administration. But he was not a great soul like Emerson, but only a minor Bengali officer, he knew how to keep the Sahib in humour, would do his job efficiently and dutifully, treat others quietly and with natural politeness. Other than these I did not observe in him any other special quality. He had a great weakness for the service. More so since it was then the month of May and the time for his pension had drawn near, he was looking forward to well-earned rest from

January next. The sudden appearance of the accused in the Alipore Bomb Conspiracy had caused in our jailor much fear and cogitation. There was no knowing what these violent energetic Bengali boys might be up to one of these days! The thought gave him no rest. He would say, there was only an inch and half left for him to climb to the top of the palm tree. But he had succeeded in negotiating only half of that distance. Towards the end of August Mr. Buchanan was pleased with his prison inspection. The jailor said gleefully, "This is Sahib's last visit during my term of office, there is nothing to worry about the pension now." Alas, for human blindness! The poet has truly said, God has given two great aids to the suffering race of man. First, he has covered the future with darkness; secondly, as his sole support and consolation, he has endowed him with blind hope. Within five days of this statement by the jailor Naren Gossain fell a victim at the hands of Kanai, and Buchanan's visits to the prison grew increasingly frequent. The result was that Jogenbabu lost his job before time, and, because of the combined attack of sorrow and disease, he soon breathed his last. . . .



Just as in the other jail departments Jogenbabu, a Bengali, was the chief, similarly in the hospital, the Bengali doctor, Baidyanathbabu, was all-in-all. His superior officer, Doctor Daly, though not as charitable as Mr. Emerson, was out and out a gentleman and a most judicious person. He had high praise for the quiet demeanour, cheerfulness and obedience of the boys, and loved to exchange pleasantries with younger people and discuss with the other accused problems of religion, politics and philosophy. The doctor was of Irish stock and he inherited many of the qualities of that liberal and sentimental race. There was no meanness or duplicity about him, once in a while when angry he might use a rough word or behave harshly, but on the whole he loved to help people. He was familiar with the trickeries and the phoney diseases resorted to by the prisoners, but sometimes, suspecting trickery, he would neglect even genuine sufferers. But once sure of the disease he would prescribe with great care and kindness.

Once I had a little temperature. It was then the rainy season; in the hospital's many-windowed huge verandahs the moisture-laden winds played about freely, and yet I was unwilling either to go to the hospital or take medicine. My views on illness and cure had undergone change and I did not have much faith in medicines. Unless the disease was severe, nature herself would cure it in her own way, such was my belief. By controlling yogically the harm done by the humid air, I wished to verify and prove to the logical mind the success of my yogic training and methods. But the doctor was extremely anxious on my account, he explained to me with much eagerness the need to go to the hospital. And when I had gone there he kept me with *empressement* and saw that I had meals such as I might get at home. Fearing that by staying in the prison-wards my health might suffer, during the rains he desired that I should be comfortably lodged in the hospital. But I refused to stay longer in the hospital and insisted on going back to the ward. He was not equally considerate to everybody; especially those who were strong and healthy. He was afraid of keeping such people in the hospital even when they were sick. He had a false notion that if ever any incident took place it would be because of these strong and restless lads. What happened in the end was its exact

opposite, the incident in the hospital was due to the ailing, emaciated Satyendranath Bose and the sick, quiet-natured Kanailal, a man of few words.

Though Dr. Daly had his qualities, most of his good deeds were inspired and set into motion by Baidyanathbabu. I had never seen such a sympathetic soul before, nor do I expect to see it after, it was as if he had been born to help and do good to others. Whenever he heard of a case of suffering, to try to lessen it had become for him almost a natural and inevitable act. To the residents of this abode of misery, full of suffering, it was as if he would distribute the carefully preserved heavenly waters to the creatures of hell. The best way to remove any want, injustice or needless suffering was to reach a report of it to the doctor's ears. If its removal lay within his powers he would never rest without doing it. Baidyanathbabu harboured in his heart a deep love of the motherland, but as a government servant he was unable to express that emotion. His only failing was his excessive sympathy. Though in a prison administrator this may be looked upon as a defect, in terms of higher ethics this may be described as the finest expression of one's humanity and the quality most beloved of God. He did not discriminate between the ordinary prisoners and the "Bande Mataram" convicts; whoever was sick, or ailing, he kept them in the hospital with the same care and would be unwilling to let them go till they had wholly come round. This fault of his was the real reason for his loss of job. After the killing of Gossain the authorities suspected his attitude of his and wrongfully dismissed him.

There is a special need to speak of the kindness and human conduct of these officers. The prison arrangements made for our detention I have been obliged to describe earlier, and afterwards too I shall try to show the inhuman cruelty of the British prison system. Lest some readers may look upon this as an evil effect of these officers, I have described the qualities of some of the chief of the staff. In the description of the early stages of prison life there will be found further evidence of these qualities. I have described my mental state on the first day of solitary confinement. For a few days I had to be without books or any other aid to spend the period of forced isolation. Later on Mr. Emerson came and handed over to me the permission to get some clothes and reading material from home.

After procuring from the prison authorities pen and ink and their official stationery I wrote to my respected maternal uncle, the well-known editor of *Sanjibani*, to send my *dhoti* and *kurta*, among books I asked for the Gita and the Upanishads. It took a couple of days for the books to reach me. Before that I had enough leisure to realise the enormity or dangerous potentiality of solitary confinement. I could understand why even firm and well-developed intellects crack up in such a state of confinement and readily turn towards insanity. At the same time, I could realise God's infinite mercy and the rare advantage offered by these same conditions. Before imprisonment I was in the habit of sitting down for meditation for an hour in the morning and evening. In this solitary prison, not having anything else to do, I tried to meditate for a longer period. But for those unaccustomed it is not easy to control and steady the mind pulled in a thousand directions. Somehow I was able to concentrate for an hour and half or two, later the mind rebelled while the body too was fatigued. At first the mind was full of thoughts of

many kinds. Afterwards devoid of human conversation and an insufferable listlessness due to absence of any subject of thought the mind gradually grew devoid of the capacity to think. There was a condition when it seemed a thousand indistinct ideas were hovering round the doors of the mind but with gates closed; one or two that were able to get through were frightened by the silence of these mental states and quietly ran away.

In this uncertain, dull state I suffered intense mental agony. In the hope of mental solace and rest for the overheated brain I looked at the beauties of nature outside, but with that solitary tree, a sliced sky and the cheerless prospects in the prison how long can the mind, in such a state, find any consolation? I looked towards the blank wall. Gazing at the lifeless white surface the mind seemed to grow even more hopeless, realising the agony of the imprisoned condition the brain was restless in the cage. I again sat down to meditate. It was impossible. The intense baffled attempt made the mind only more tired, useless, made it burn and boil. I looked around, at last I found some large black ants moving about a hole in the ground, and I spent some time watching their efforts and movements. Later I noticed some tiny red ants. Soon there was a big battle between the black and the red, the black ants began to bite and kill the red ants. I felt an intense charity and sympathy for these unjustly treated red ants and tried to save them from the black killers. This gave me an occupation and something to think about. Thanks to the ants I passed a few days like this. Still there was no way to spend the long days ahead. I tried to argue with myself, did some deliberate reflection, but day after day the mind rebelled and felt increasingly desolate. It was as though time weighed heavy, an unbearable torture; broken by that pressure it did not have leisure even to breathe freely. It was like being throttled by an enemy in a dream and yet without the strength to move one's limbs.

I was amazed at this condition! True, while outside, I never wished to stay idle or without any activity, still I had spent long periods in solitary musings. Had the mind now become so weak that the solitude of a few days could make me so restless? Perhaps, I thought; there is a world of difference between voluntary and compulsory solitude. It is one thing to stay alone in one's home, but to have to stay, forced by others, in a solitary prison cell is quite another. There one can turn at will to men for refuge, find shelter in book knowledge and its stylistic elegance, in the dear voice of friends, the noise on the roadside, in the varied shows of the world; one can find joy of mind and feel at ease. But here, bound to the wheels of iron law, subservient to the whim of others, one had to live deprived of every other contact. According to the proverb, one who can stand solitude is either a god or a brute; it is a discipline quite beyond the power of men. Previously I was unable to believe in what the proverb said, now I could feel that even for one accustomed to the yogic life this discipline is not easy to acquire. I remember the terrifying end of the Italian regicide, Brecci. His cruel judges, instead of ordering him to be hanged, had given him seven years' solitary imprisonment. Within a year Brecci had gone mad. But he had endured for some time! Was my mental strength so poor?

Then I did not know that God was having a game with me, through which He was giving me a few necessary lessons. First, He showed me the state of mind in which prisoners condemned to solitary cells move towards insanity, and turned me wholly against the inhuman cruelty of western prison administration, so that I might, to the best of my ability, turn my countrymen and the world from these barbarous ways to the path of more humane prison organisation. This was the first lesson. I remembered, fifteen years back, after returning home from England, I had written some bitterly critical articles in the *Induprakash*, of Bombay, against the petitionary ethics of the then Congress. Seeing that these articles were influencing the mind of the young, the late Mahadeo Govind Ranade had told me, when I met him, for nearly half an hour, that I should give up writing these articles, and advised me to take up some other Congress work. He was desirous of my taking up the work of prison reform. I was astonished and unhappy at his unexpected suggestion and had refused to undertake that work. I did not know then that this was a prelude to the distant future and that one day God himself would keep me in prison for a year and make me see the cruelty and futility of the system and the need for reform. Now I understood that in the present political atmosphere there was no possibility of any reform of the prison system, but I resolved before my conscience to propagate and argue in its favour so that these hellish remnants of an alien civilisation were not perpetuated in a self-determining India.

I also understood His second purpose: it was to reveal and expose before my mind its own weakness so that I might get rid of it forever. For one who seeks the yogic state, crowd and solitude should mean the same. Indeed, the weakness dropped off within a very few days, and now it seems that the mental poise would not be disturbed even by twenty years of solitude. In the dispensation of the All-Good (*mangalamaya*) even out of evil cometh good.

The third purpose was to give me this lesson that my yoga practices would not be done by my personal effort, but that a spirit of reverence (*sraddha*) and complete self-surrender (*atma-samarpana*) were the road to attain perfection in yoga, and whatever power or realisation the Lord would give out of His benignity, to accept and utilise these should be the only aim of my yogic endeavour. The day from which the deep darkness of Ignorance began to lessen, I started to see the true nature of the All-Good Lord's amazing infinite goodness as I watched the different events in the ward. There is no event — great or small or even the smallest — from which some good has not accrued. He often fulfils three or four aims through a single event. We frequently see the working of a blind force in the world, accepting waste as part of nature's method we ignore God's omniscience and find fault with the divine Intelligence. The charge is unfounded. The divine Intelligence never works blindly, there cannot be the slightest waste of His power, rather the restrained manner in which, through the minimum of means, He achieves a variety of results is beyond the human intelligence.

Troubled by mental listlessness I spent a few days in agony in this manner. One afternoon as I was thinking streams of thought began to flow endlessly and then suddenly these grew so uncontrolled and incoherent that I could feel that the mind's regulating power was about to cease. Afterwards when I came back to myself, I could

recollect that though the power of mental control had ceased, the intelligence was not self-lost or did not deviate for a moment, but it was as if watching quietly this marvellous phenomenon. But at the time, shaking with the terror of being overcome by insanity, I had not been able to notice that. I called upon God with eagerness and intensity and prayed to him to prevent my loss of intelligence. That very moment there spread over my being such a gentle and cooling breeze, the heated brain became relaxed, easy and supremely blissful such as in all my life I had never known before. Just as a child sleeps, secure and fearless, on the lap of his mother, so I remained on the lap of the World-Mother.

From that day all my troubles of prison life were over. Afterwards on many occasions, during the period of detention, inquietude, solitary imprisonment, and mental unease because of lack of activity, bodily trouble or disease, in the lean periods of yogic life, these have come, but that day in a single moment God had given my inner being such a strength that these sorrows as they came and went did not leave any trace or touch on the mind; relishing strength and delight in the sorrow itself the mind was able to reject these subjective sufferings. The sufferings seemed as fragile as water drops on a lily leaf. Then when the books came, their need had considerably lessened. I could have stayed on even if the books were not there. Though it is not the purpose of these articles to write a history of my inner life, still I could not but mention this fact. From this one incident it will be clear how it was possible to live happily during long solitary confinement. It was for this reason that God had brought about this situation or experience. Without turning me mad he had enacted in my mind the gradual process towards insanity that takes place in solitary confinement, keeping my intelligence as the unmoved spectator of the entire drama. Out of this came strength, and I had an excess of kindness and sympathy for the victims of human cruelty and torture. I also realised the extraordinary power and efficacy of prayer.



During the period of my solitary confinement Dr. Daly and the Assistant Superintendent would come to my room almost every day and have a little chat. From the beginning, I do not know why, I had been able to draw their special favour and sympathy. I did not speak much with them, but just answered only when they asked something. If they raised any issues I either listened quietly or would stop after speaking a few words. Yet they did not give up visiting me. One day Mr. Daly spoke to me, "I have been able, through my Assistant Superintendent, to get the big boss to agree that every day, in the morning and evening, you will be allowed to take a walk in front of the decree. I do not like that you should be confined throughout the day in a small cell, it's bad for both body and mind." From that day on I would take a stroll everyday in the morning and evening in the open space before the decree. In the afternoons it would be for ten, fifteen or twenty minutes, in the morning for an hour; at times I would stay out for two hours, there was no time limit about it. I enjoyed this very much. On one side were the jail industries, on the other the cowshed — my independent kingdom was flanked by these two. From the industrial section to the cowshed, from the cowshed to the industrial section, travelling to and fro I would

recite the deeply moving, immortal, powerful *mantras* of the Upanishads, or watching the movements and activities of the prisoners I tried to realise the basic truths of the immanent Godhead, God in every form. In the trees, the houses, the walls, in men, animals, birds, metals, the earth, with the help of the *mantra*: All this is the Brahman, (*sarvam khalvidam Brahma*) I would try to fix or impose that realisation on all of these.

As I went on doing like this sometimes the prison ceased to appear to be a prison at all. The high wall, those iron bars, the white wall, the green-leaved tree shining in sunlight, it seemed as if these common-place objects were not unconscious at all, but that they were vibrating with a universal consciousness, they love me and wish to embrace me, or so I felt. Men, cows, ants, birds are moving, flying, singing, speaking, yet all is Nature's game; behind all this is a great pure detached spirit rapt in a serene delight. Once in a while it seemed as if God Himself was standing under the tree, to play upon his Flute of Delight; and with its sheer charm to draw my very soul out. Always it seemed as if someone was embracing me, holding me on one's lap. The manifestation of these emotions overpowered my whole body and mind, a pure and wide peace reigned everywhere. It is impossible to describe that. The hard cover of my life opened up and a spring of love for all creatures gushed from within. Along with this love such *sattvic* emotions as charity, kindness, *aimsa*, etc., overpowered my dominantly *rajasic* nature and found an abundant release. And the more these qualities developed, the greater the delight and the deeper the sense of unclouded peace. The anxiety over the case had vanished from the beginning, now it was a contrary emotion that found room in my mind. God is All-Good, He had brought me into the prison-house for my good, my release and the quashing of charges was certain, I grew firm in this faith. After this for many days I did not have to suffer any troubles in the jail. It took some days for these emotions to settle and deepen.

It was while this was going on that the case opened in the magistrate's court. At first the mind was greatly perturbed, by being dragged from the silence of solitary imprisonment to the noise of the world outside. The patience of inner discipline was lost and the mind did not at all consent to listen for five hours on end to the dull and bothersome arguments by the prosecution. At first I tried to continue the inner life while sitting in the court-room, but the unaccustomed mind would be attracted to every sound and sight, and the attempt would not succeed, in the midst of the noise going on all round. Later the feelings changed and I acquired the power to reject from the mind the immediate sounds and sights, and draw the mind inwards. But this did not take place in the early stages, the true power of concentration had not developed then. For that reason, giving up the futile attempt, I would be content with seeing, now and then, God in all creatures, for the rest I would observe the words and behaviour of my companions in adversity, else think of other things, or sometimes listened to Mr. Norton's valuable remarks or even the evidence of witnesses.

I found that while spending one's time in solitary imprisonment had grown easy and pleasant, it was not that easy in the midst of the crowd and in the life-and-death game of a serious case. I greatly enjoyed the laughter, the jollities and the pleasantries of the accused lads, else the time spent at the court appeared wholly annoying. At four-thirty

I would happily get into the police van and return to the prison. The contact of human life and each other's company, after fifteen or sixteen days of prison life, made the other prisoners extremely happy. As soon as they got into the carriage the fountain of laughter and conversation would open and during the ten minutes that they were inside the carriage the stream would never cease for a moment.

On the first day they took us to the court with great eclat. There was a small platoon of European sergeants who went along with us and they carried loaded pistols. At the time of our getting into the carriage a band of armed policemen stood guard round us and did some marching behind the carriage; the ritual was repeated at the time of our getting down as well. Looking at so much to-do some inexperienced spectators must have thought that these laughter-loving young lads must be some group of daredevil famous warriors. Who knows how much courage and strength resided in their bodies so that even with their empty hands they might be able to break through the impassive cordon of a hundred policemen and tommies. Maybe it was for this reason that we were being conducted with so much honour and ceremony. For a few days the pomp was kept up, then there was a gradual decline, in the end two to four sergeants would be there to take and bring us back. At the time of our getting down they did not very much observe how we entered the prison; we would walk into it as if we were returning home after a stroll, just as a free person does. Watching this carelessness and slackening the Police Commissioner and some of the Superintendents said angrily: "On the first day we had arranged for twenty-five to thirty sergeants, now we see that not even four or five turn up." They would scold the sergeants and make strict arrangements for supervision. Then, maybe for two days, two more sergeants would come, and again the earlier slackness followed!

The sergeants found that the devotees of the bomb were quite harmless folk, who were not attempting to escape and had no plans to kill or attack anyone, so they wondered why they should waste valuable time in performing unpleasant duties. At first before entering and leaving the court there used to be a personal search, during which we used to have the joy of feeling the soft palms of the sergeants, otherwise no one was likely to profit or to lose from this search. It was clear that our protectors had profound scepticism about the utility of such a procedure, and after a few days this was also given up. We could safely carry with us into the courtroom books, bread, sugar just as we liked. They soon got the feeling that we were not there to hurl a bomb or fire a pistol. But I noticed that there was one singular fear from which the sergeant's mind was not free. Who knew which of the accused will have the evil brainwave of hurling a pair of a shoes at the glorious pate of the magistrate? Then the fat would be in the fire! For this reason entering the court with shoes on was strictly forbidden, and the sergeants were always alert on that point. I did not notice them to be keen on any other safety measures.



The nature of the case was a little strange. Magistrate, counsel, witnesses, evidence, exhibits, accused, all appeared a little *outré*. Watching, day after day, the endless stream of witnesses and exhibits, the counsel's unvaried dramatic performance, the boyish

frivolity and light-heartedness of the youthful magistrate, looking at the amazing spectacle I often thought that instead of sitting in a British court of justice we were inside a stage of some world of fiction. Let me describe some of the odd inhabitants of that kingdom.

The star performer of the show was the government counsel, Mr. Norton. Not only the star performer, but he was also its composer, stage manager and prompter — a versatile genius like him must be rare in the world. Counsel Mr. Norton hailed from Madras, hence it appeared he was unaccustomed and inexperienced in the common code and courtesy as it obtained among the barristers of Bengal. He had been at one time a leader of the National Organisation, and for that reason might have been incapable of tolerating opposition and contradiction, and in the habit of punishing opponents. Such natures are known as ferocious. I cannot say whether Mr. Norton had been the lion of Madras Corporation, but he certainly was the king among beasts at the Alipore court. It was hard to admire his depth of legal acumen — which was as rare as winter in summer. But in the ceaseless flow of words, and through verbal quips, in the strange ability to transmute inconsequential witness into something serious, in the boldness of making groundless statements or statements with little ground, in riding rough-shod over witnesses and junior barristers and in the charming ability to turn white into black, to see his incomparable genius in action was but to admire him. Among the great counsels there are three kinds — those who, through their legal acumen, satisfactory exposition and subtle analysis can create a favourable impression on the judge; those who can skilfully draw out the truth from the witnesses and by presenting the facts of the case and the subject under discussion draw the mind of the judge or the jury towards themselves; and those who through their loud speech, by threats and oratorical flow can dumbfound the witness and splendidly confuse the entire issue, can win the case by distracting the intelligence of the judge or the jury. Mr. Norton is foremost in this third category. This is by no means a defect. The counsel is a worldly person, he takes money for his service, to gain the intention of the client is his duty, is what he is there for. Now, according to the British legal system the bringing out of truth by the contending parties, complainant and defendant, is not the real purpose, to win the case, by hook or by crook, is what it is really after. Hence the counsel must bend his energies towards that end, else he would be unfaithful to the law of his being. If God has not endowed one with other qualities then one must fight with such qualities as one possesses, and win the case with their help. Thus Mr. Norton was but following the law of his own being (*svadharmā*). The government paid him a thousand rupees a day. In case this turned out to be a useless expenditure the government would be a loser. Mr. Norton was trying heart and soul to prevent such a loss to the government. But in a political case, the accused have to be given wide privileges and not to emphasise doubtful or uncertain evidence were rules germane to the British legal system. Had Mr. Norton cared to remember this convention it would not have, I feel, harmed the case. On the other hand, a few innocent persons would have been spared the torture of solitary imprisonment and innocent Ashok Nandi might have even been alive.

The counsel's leonine nature was probably at the root of the trouble. Just as Holinshed and Plutarch had collected the material for Shakespeare's historical plays, in the same manner the police had collected the material for this drama of a case. And Mr. Norton happened to be the Shakespeare of this play. I, however, noticed a difference between Shakespeare and Mr. Norton: Shakespeare would now and then leave out some of the available material, but Mr. Norton never allowed any material, true or false, cogent or irrelevant, from the smallest to the largest, to go unused; on top of it he could create such a wonderful plot by his self-created and abundant suggestion, inference and hypothesis that the great poets and writers of fiction like Shakespeare and Defoe would have to acknowledge defeat before this grand master of the art. The critic might say that just as Falstaff's hotel bill showed a pennyworth of bread and countless gallons of wine, similarly in Norton's plot "an ounce of proof was mixed with tons of inference and suggestion." But even detractors are bound to praise the elegance and construction of the plot.

It gave me great happiness that Mr. Norton had chosen me as the protagonist of this play. Like Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, in Mr. Norton's plot at the centre of the mighty rebellion stood I, an extraordinarily sharp, intelligent and powerful, bold, bad man! Of the national movement I was the alpha and the omega, its creator and saviour, engaged in undermining the British empire. As soon as he came across any piece of excellent or vigorous writing in English he would jump and loudly proclaim, Aurobindo Ghose! All the legal and illegal, the organised activities or unexpected consequences of the movement were the doings of Aurobindo Ghose! And when they are the doings of Aurobindo Ghose then when even lawfully admissible they must contain hidden illegal intentions and potentialities. He probably thought that if I were not caught within two years, it would be all up with the British empire. If my name ever appeared on any torn sheet of paper, Mr. Norton's joy knew no bounds. With great cordiality he would present it at the holy feet of the presiding magistrate.

It is a pity I was not born as an Avatar otherwise thanks to his intense devotion and ceaseless contemplation of me for the nonce, he would surely have earned his release, *mukti*, then and there and both the period of our detention and the government's expenses would have been curtailed. Since the sessions court declared me innocent of the charges, Norton's plot was sadly shorn of its glory and elegance. By leaving the Prince of Denmark out of *Hamlet* the humourless judge, Beachcroft, damaged the greatest poem of the twentieth century. If the critic is allowed his right to alter poetic compositions, such loss of meaning can hardly be prevented. Norton's other agony was that some of the other witnesses too were so caused that they had wholly refused to bear evidence in keeping with his fabricated plot. At this Norton would grow red with fury and, roaring like a lion, he would strike terror in the heart of the witness and cower him down. Like the legitimate and irrepressible anger of a poet when his words are altered or of a stage manager when the actor's declamation, tone or postures go against his directions, Norton felt a comparable loss of temper. His quarrel with barrister Bhuban Chatterji had this holy or *sattwic* anger as its root. Such an inordinately sensitive person as Mr. Chatterji I have not come across. He had no sense of time or propriety. For instance, whenever Mr. Norton sacrificed the distinction

between the relevant and the irrelevant, tried to force odd arguments purely for the sake of poetic effect, Mr. Chatterji would invariably get up and raise objections and declare these as inadmissible. He did not appreciate that these were being furnished not because they were relevant or legal, but because they might serve the purpose of Norton's stage-craft. At such impropriety not Norton alone but Mr. Birley could hardly contain himself. Once Mr. Birley addressed Chatterji in a pathetic tone: "Mr. Chatterji, we were getting on very nicely before you came." Indeed so, if one raises objections at every word the drama does not proceed, nor has the audience the joy of it. If Mr. Norton was the author of the play, its protagonist and stage manager, Mr. Birley may well be described as its patron. He seemed to be a credit to his Scotch origin: His figure was a symbol or reminder of Scotland. Very fair, quite tall, extremely spare, the little head on the long body seemed ... as if a ripe cocoon had been put on the crest of Cleopatra's obelisk! Sandy-haired, all the cold and ice of Scotland seemed to lie frozen on his face. So tall a person needed an intelligence to match, else one had to be sceptical about the economy of nature. But in this matter, of the creation of Birley, probably the Creatrix had been slightly unmindful and inattentive. The English poet Marlowe has described this miserliness as "infinite riches in a little room" but encountering Mr. Birley one has an opposite feeling, infinite room in little riches. Finding so little intelligence in such a lengthy body one indeed felt pity. Remembering how a few such administrators were governing thirty crores of Indians could not but rouse a deep devotion towards the majesty of the English masters and their methods of administration.

Mr. Birley's knowledge came a cropper during the cross-examination by Shrijit Byomkesh Chakravarty. Asked to declare when he had taken charge of the case in his own benign hands and how to complete the process of taking over charge of a case, after years of magistracy, Mr. Birley's head reeled to find these out. Unable to solve the problem he finally tried to save his skin by leaving it to Mr. Chakravarty to decide. Even now among the most complex problems of the case the question remains as to when Mr. Birley had taken over this case. The pathetic appeal to Mr. Chatterji, which I have quoted earlier, will help one to infer Mr. Birley's manner of judgment. From the start, charmed by Mr. Norton's learning and rhetoric, he had been completely under his spell. He would follow, so humbly, the road pointed out by Norton. Agreeing with his views, he laughed when Norton laughed, grew angry as Norton would be angry. Looking at this daft childlike conduct one sometimes felt tenderly and paternally towards him. Birley was exceedingly childlike. I could never think of him as a magistrate, it seemed as if a school student suddenly turned teacher, was sitting at the teacher's high desk. That was the manner in which he conducted the affairs of the court. In case someone did not behave pleasantly towards him, he would scold him like a schoolmaster. If any one of us, bored with the farce of a case, started to talk among ourselves, Mr. Birley would snap like a schoolmaster, in case people did not obey he would order everybody to keep standing and if this was not done at once he would tell the sentry to see to it. We had grown so accustomed to the schoolmasterish manner that when Birley and Chatterji had started to quarrel we were expecting every moment that the barrister would now be served with the stand up order. But Mr. Birley adopted

an opposite course. Shouting "Sit down, Mr. Chatterji," he made this new and disobedient pupil of the Alipore School take his seat. Just as when a student asks questions or demands further explanation an irritated teacher threatens him, so whenever the advocate representing the accused raised objections, Mr. Birley would threaten him.

Some witnesses gave Norton a hell of a time. Norton wanted to prove that a particular piece of writing was in the handwriting of such-and-such accused. If the witness said "No sir, this is not exactly like that handwriting, but may be, one cannot be sure," — many witnesses answered like that — Norton would become quite agitated. Scolding, shouting, threatening, he would try somehow to get the desired answer. And his last question would be, "What is your belief? Do you think it is so or not?" To this the witness could say neither "yes" nor "no." Every time, again and again, he would repeat the same answer and try to make Norton understand that he had no "belief" in the matter and was swayed between scepticisms. But Norton did not care for such an answer. Every time he would hurl the same question, like thunder, at the witness: "Come, sir, what is your belief?" Mr. Birley, in his turn, would catch fire from the embers of Norton's anger, and thunder from his high seat above: "*Tomar biswas ki achay?*"<sup>1</sup> Poor witness! He would be in a dilemma. He had no "biswas" (belief), yet on one side of him was ranged the magistrate, and on the other, like a hungry tiger, Norton was raging in a circle to disembowel him and get at the priceless never-to-be-had "biswas." Often the "biswas" would not materialise, and his brain in a whirl, the sweating witness would escape with his life from the torture chamber. Some who held their life dearer than their "biswas" would make good their escape by offering an artificial "biswas" at the feet of Mr. Norton, who also, now highly pleased, would conduct the rest of the cross examination with care and affection. Because such a counsel had been matched with a magistrate of the same calibre the case had all the more taken on the proportions of a play.

Though a few of the witnesses went against Mr. Norton, the majority answered in support of his questions. Among these there were few familiar faces. One or two we of course knew. Of these Devdas Karan helped to dispel our boredom and made us hold our sides with laughter, for which we shall be eternally grateful to him. In course of giving evidence he said that at the time of the Midnapore Conference when Surendrababu had asked from his students devotion to the teacher, *gurubhakti*, Aurobindobabu had spoken out: "What did Drona do?" Hearing this Mr. Norton's eagerness and curiosity knew no bounds, he must have thought "Drona" to be a devotee of the bomb or a political killer or someone associated with the Manicktola Garden or the Student's Store. Norton may have thought that the phrase meant that Aurobindo Ghose was advising the giving of bombs to Surendrababu as a reward instead of *gurubhakti*. For such an interpretation would have helped the case considerably. Hence he asked eagerly: "What did Drona do?"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> What is your belief? Or, simply, What do you think?

<sup>2</sup> In the *Mahabharata*, Drona or Dronacharya is a preceptor of the royal princes. Norton and others, ignorant of the reference, took him to be a contemporary character, in fact a

At first the witness was unable to make out the nature of the [silly] question. And for five minutes a debate went on. In the end, throwing his hands high, Mr. Karan told Norton: "Drona performed many a miracle." This did not satisfy Mr. Norton. How could he be content without knowing the whereabouts of Drona's bomb? So he asked again: "What do you mean by that? Tell me what exactly he did." The witness gave many answers, but in none was Dronacharya's life's secret unravelled as Norton would have liked it. He now lost his temper and started to roar. The witness too began to shout. An advocate, smiling, expressed the doubt that perhaps the witness did not know what Drona had done. At this Mr. Karan went wild with anger and wounded pride, *abhimān*. "What," he shouted, "I, I do not know what Drona had done? Bah, have I read the *Mahabharata* from cover to cover in vain?" For half an hour a battle royal waged between Norton and Karan over Drona's corpse. Every five minutes, shaking the Alipore judge's court, Norton hurled his question: "Out with it, Mr. Editor! What did Drona do?" In answer the editor began a long cock and bull story, but there was no reliable news about what Drona had done. The entire court reverberated with peals of laughter. At last, during tiffin time, Mr. Karan came back after a little reflection with a cool head, and he suggested this solution of the problem, that poor Drona had done nothing and that the half-hour long tug of war over his departed soul had been in vain, it was Arjuna who had killed his *guru*, Drona. Thanks to this false accusation, Dronacharya, relieved, must have offered his thanks at Kailasha to Sadashiva, that because of Mr. Karan's evidence he did not have to stand in the dock in the Alipore bomb conspiracy case. A word from the editor would have easily established his relationship with Aurobindo Ghose. But the all-merciful Sadashiva saved him from such a fate.



The witnesses in the case could be divided into three categories. There were the police and the secret service men; there were people from the lower classes and other gentry, for misdeeds of their own, deeply in love with the police; and there were others who, because of personal failings and deprived of the love of the police, had been dragged unwillingly to give evidence. Each category had its own style of offering evidence. The gentlemen of the police would say their say, already decided upon, quite cheerfully, without hesitation, just as it pleased them, would recognise those they had to, without a shade of doubt, hesitation or any margin of error. The friends of the police would give witness with considerable alacrity; those they had to identify they would, but sometimes in their excessive eagerness they would even identify those who were not to be identified. Those who had been brought there against their wishes would say only what they knew, but this would come to very little and Norton would feel unsatisfied. Assuming that the witness was holding back highly valuable and certain proof he would make every attempt to cross-examine him and get the secret out of his system, by a surgical operation of the abdomen as it were. This put the witnesses into a good deal of difficulty. On one side stood a thundering Mr. Norton, a red-eyed Mr. Birley, on

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conspirator.

the other a sense of the great sin of sending, on false evidence, one's countrymen to the Andaman islands. Whether to please Norton and Birley or God, for the witness this question assumed serious proportions. On one side, temporary danger because of incurring other men's displeasure, on the other, hell and misery in the next life due to one's evil deeds. But the witness would reflect: hell and the next life are still far beyond while the man-made dangers might swallow him at the next moment. Afraid that they might be convicted of bearing false evidence because of their unwillingness to do so, such a fear was likely to be shared by many, since in such cases the consequences were none too rare. For this type of witness the time spent in the witness-box was made up of a good deal of fear and agony. At the end of the cross-examination their half-departed life would return to their bodies and relieve them of the suffering.

Some, however, gave their evidence boldly without caring for Nortonian thunders, at which the English counsel, following national habit, would soften. Like this so many witnesses came and went and gave such a variety of evidence, but not one helped the police cause in any way worth mentioning. One spoke quite plainly, "I know nothing, and cannot understand why the police have dragged me into it!" This sort of method for conducting cases is possible perhaps only in India, had it been some other country the judge would have been annoyed and would have severely censured and taught the police a lesson. Hauling hundreds of witnesses, gathered on a basis of guesswork, and without inquiring whether one was guilty or not, wasting the country's finances and keeping without any sense the accused for long periods under the hardship of prison life, is worthy only of the police force of this country. But what were the poor police to do? They are detectives only in name, but without much power of their own. Hence to throw a wide net and catch good, bad and indifferent witnesses in this manner and bring them to the witness box, like pigs in a poke, was their only way. Who knows, these men might have some information, even provide some proof.

The method for identification was also extremely mysterious. First, the witness was asked, "Would you be able to recognise any one of these persons?" If the witness answered, "Yes, I can," happy Mr. Norton would arrange for the identification parade in the witness box itself and order him to demonstrate the powers of his memory. In case the man said, "I am not sure, maybe I can recognise," Mr. Norton would grow a little sad and say, "All right, go and try." When someone said, "No, I can't, I haven't seen them" or "I did not mark carefully," Mr. Norton would not let him go even then. Looking at so many faces some memory of the past life might come back, in that hope he would send him to the experiment to find out. The witness however lacked such a yogic power. Perhaps the fellow had no faith in the past life, and gravely marching, under the sergeant's supervision, between two long rows of accused persons, he would say, without even looking at us, "No, I don't know any one of them." Crestfallen, Norton would take back his human net without any catch.

In course of this trial there was a marvellous illustration of how sharp and correct human memory could be. Thirty to forty people would be kept standing, one didn't know their name, hadn't known them at all in this or any other life, yet whether one had seen or not seen someone two months back, or seen such and such person at three

places and not seen in the other two; maybe one had seen him brush his teeth once, and so his figure remains imprinted in the brain for all time. When did one see this person, what was he doing, was there anyone else with him, or was he alone? One remembers nothing of these, yet his figure is fixed in one's mind for all lives; one has met Hari ten times, so there is no probability of forgetting him, but even if one has seen Shyam only for half a minute, one would not be able to forget him till one's last breath, and with no possibility of mistake,— such a power of memory is not to be found frequently in this imperfect human nature, this earth wrapped up in matter and its unconsciousness. But not one, not two, every police chap seemed to be the owner of such uncanny, error-proof accurate memory. Because of which our devotion and respect for the C.I.D. grew more profound day by day.

It is not that in the magistrate's court we did not have, once or twice, occasions for scepticism. When I found in the written evidence that Sisir Ghose had been in Bombay in the month of April, yet a few police chaps had seen him precisely during that period in Scott's Lane and Harrison Road, one could not but feel a little uneasy. And when Birendrachandra Sen of Sylhet, while he was physically present at Baniachung, at his father's place, became visible in his subtle body to the occult vision of the C.I.D. at the Garden and Scott's Lane — of which Scott's Lane Birendra knew nothing, as was proved conclusively in the written evidence — the doubts could not but deepen: especially when those who had never set their foot in Scott's Lane were informed that the police had often found them there, in the circumstances a little suspicion seemed not unnatural. A witness from Midnapore — whom the accused persons from Midnapore however described as a secret service man — said that he had seen Hemchandra Sen of Sylhet, lecturing at Tamluk. Now Hemchandra had never seen Tamluk with his mortal eyes, yet his shadow self had rushed from Sylhet to Midnapore and, with his powerful and seditious nationalist speech delighted the eyes and ears of our detective monsieur. But the causal body of Charuchandra Roy of Chandernagore, materialising at Manicktola had perpetrated even greater mysteries. Two police officers declared on oath that on such and such date at such and such time they had seen Charubabu at Shyambazar, from where he had walked, in the company of a conspirator, to the Manicktola Gardens. They had followed him there and watched him from close quarters, and there could be no ground for error. Both witnesses did not budge when cross-examined. The words of Vyasa are true indeed — *vyasasya vacanam satyam*. The evidence of the police also cannot be otherwise. They were not wrong in their view about date and time either, since from the evidence of the Principal, Dupleix College, Chandernagore, it seemed that on the same day and at the same time, Charubabu had taken leave from the College and gone to Calcutta. But the surprising thing was that on that day and at that hour on the Howrah station platform he was found talking with the Mayor of Chandernagore, Tardival, his wife, the Governor of Chandernagore and few other distinguished European gentlemen. Remembering the occasion they had, all of them, agreed to stand witness in favour of Charubabu. Since the police had to release Charubabu at the instance of the French government the mystery has remained unsolved.

But I would advise Charubabu to send all the proofs to the Psychical Research Society and help in the advancement of knowledge. Police evidence — especially the C.I.D.'s — can never be false, hence there is no way out except to seek refuge in Theosophy. On the whole during this trial at every stage I could find, in the British legal system, how easily the innocent could be punished, sent to prison, suffer transportation, even loss of life. Unless one stood in the dock oneself, one cannot realise the delusive untruth of the Western penal code. It is something of a gamble, a gamble with human freedom, with man's joys and sorrows, a life-long agony for him and his family, his friends and relatives, insult, a living death. In this system there is no counting as to how often guilty persons escape and how many innocent persons perish. Once one has been involved in this gamble, this cruel, callous, reactionary social machinery, one can understand the reason for so much propaganda on behalf of Socialism and Anarchism, and their wide influence. In such a milieu it is not to be wondered at that many liberal and kind-hearted men have started to say: it is better to end and destroy this society; if society has to be preserved with the aid of so much sin and suffering, the burning sighs of the innocent and their heart's blood, its preservation would seem unnecessary.



The only worthwhile event in the magistrate's court was the evidence of Narendranath Goswami. Before describing that event let me first speak about the companions of my days of trouble, the boys who had been accused along with me. Watching their behaviour in the court room I could well guess that a new age had dawned, a new type of children had begun to live on the Mother's lap. Those days the Bengali boys were of two kinds: either docile, well mannered, harmless, of good character, cowardly, lacking in self-respect and high aims; else they were evil characters, rowdies, restless, cheats, lacking in restraint and honesty. Between these two extremes, creatures of many kinds must have been born on the lap of Mother Bengal, but except for eight or ten extraordinary talented and vigorous pioneers no strong representatives of a superior breed beyond these two groups were usually to be seen. The Bengali had intelligence, talent but little power of manhood. Looking at these lads, however, one felt as if the liberal, daring, puissant men of an earlier age with a different training had come back to India. That fearless and innocent look in their eyes, the words breathing power, their carefree delighted laughter, even in the midst of great danger the undaunted courage, cheerfulness of mind, absence of despair, or grief, all this was a symptom not of the inert Indians of those days, but of a new age, a new race and a new activity. If these were murderers, then one must say that the bloody shadow of killing had not fallen across their nature, in which there was nothing at all of cruelty, recklessness or bestiality. Without worrying in the least about the future or the outcome of the trial they passed their days in prison with boyish fun, laughter, games, reading and in discussions. Quite early they had made friends with every one, with officers, the sentries, convicts, European sergeants, detectives, court officials and without distinguishing between friends and enemies, high and low, had started to tell stories and jokes. They found the time spent in the court-room quite tiresome, for in that farce of a trial there was very little that was enjoyable. They had no books with which to pass

the time, and talking was forbidden. Those of them who had started doing yoga, they hadn't so far learnt how to concentrate even in a crowd, for them passing the time proved quite difficult. At first some of them began to bring books with them, this was soon followed by others.

Later on, one could see a strange spectacle: while the trial was going on, and the fate of thirty or forty accused persons was being wrangled over, whose result might be hanging or transportation for life, some of the accused persons without as much as glancing at what is happening, around them, were absorbed in reading the novels of Bankimchandra, Vivekananda's *Raja Yoga* or *Science of Religions*, or the Gita, the Puranas, or European Philosophy. Neither the English sergeants nor the Indian policemen objected to this. They must have thought, if this keeps the caged tigers peaceful, that only lightens their duty. Further, this arrangement harmed no one. But one day Mr. Birley's eyes were drawn to it, to the magistrate this was unbearable and unpardonable. For two or three days he kept quiet, then, he could not hold himself any longer and gave orders forbidding the bringing of books to the court room. Really, Birley was dispensing justice so beautifully, but instead of everybody enjoying that and listening to his judgements, here was everybody reading books! There was no doubt that this showed great disrespect for Birley's dignity and the majesty of British justice. During the period of our detention in separate cells, it was only in the police van, an hour or half before the magistrate's arrival and during tiffin time that we had some scope for conversation. Those who were known to each other from before would employ this recess to have a revenge for the forced silence and solitude of the cell and would spend the time in jokes, pleasantries and a variety of discussions. But the leisures were not conducive to conversation with unfamiliar people, hence I did not talk much. I would listen to their stories and laughter but myself did not join anyone other than my brother and Abinash.

One person would however often edge his way towards my side, this was the future approver, Narendranath Goswami. He was not quiet and well-behaved like the other boys, but looked bold, light-hearted and in character, speech and act, undisciplined. At the time of his arrest he had shown his natural courage and forwardness, but being light-hearted it was impossible for him to put up with the minimum suffering of prison life. A landlord's son, brought up in luxury and evil ways, the severe restraint and austerity of prison life had proved too much for him, a fact which he did not hesitate to express before others. The grotesque longing to be freed by any means from this agony began to grow upon his mind from day to day. At first he had the hope that by withdrawing his confession he might be able to prove that the police had extorted, by torturing him, a confession of his guilt. He told us that his father was determined to procure these false witnesses. But within a very few days another attitude revealed itself. His father and a *moktar*, a pleader's agent, began to visit him frequently in the prison. In the end the detective Shamsul-Alam also came and started holding long and secret conversations with him. During this period Gossain developed a tendency to be curious and ask questions. At this many felt suspicious about him. He would ask big and small questions, of Barindra and Upendra, if they knew or were close to the big men of India, and who were the people that helped the secret society with money, and the

men belonging to the group outside India and in the different provinces of India, who would run the society now, where are its branches, etc. The news of Gossain's sudden thirst for learning soon reached everyone and his intimacy with Shamsul-Alam too, instead of remaining confidential love-talk, became an open secret. There was a good deal of talk over this and it was noticed by some that these ever new questions would sprout in Gossain's mind after every visit from the police. It is needless to say that he did not receive satisfactory answers to his questions. When these things were being first talked about among the accused, Gossain himself had confessed that the police were trying to persuade him in a number of ways to turn into a "king's approver." He had once mentioned this to me in the court. "What did you tell them?" I had asked him. "Do you think I am going to listen to that! And even if I do, what do I know that I could offer evidence in the way they would like to have it?"

When after a few days he broached the subject once again, I noticed events had moved a bit too far. While standing by my side at the identification parade he told me, "The police are visiting me all the time." "Why don't you tell them that Sir Andrew Frazer was the chief patron of the secret society, that would be ample reward for their labour," I told him jokingly. "I have said something of the sort," answered Gossain. "I have told them that Surendranath Banerji is our head and that once I had shown him a bomb." Staggered at this I asked, "What was the need of saying that sort of thing?" In answer Gossain said: "I shall make mincemeat of the... I have told them many other things of that kind. Let the —s die of seeking for corroboration. Who knows because of this the trial may go phut." In answer I only said: "You should give up this kind of mischief. By trying to be clever with them you will be fooled." I do not know how far Gossain had spoken the truth. The other accused thought that he had said all this in order to throw dust in our eyes. To me it seemed that till then Gossain had not wholly made up his mind to turn an approver, even if he had proceeded quite far in that direction, but he had also the hope of spoiling the case by misleading the police. To achieve one's end through trickery and evil ways is the natural inspiration for a wicked disposition. From then on I could make out that, under the thumb of the police, by telling them fact or fiction, just as they needed, Gossain would try to save his own skin. The degradations of an evil nature were being enacted before our very eyes. I noticed how, from day to day, Gossain's mind was undergoing rapid changes, his face, his movements and manners, his language were not the same as before. He started to adduce economic and political justifications in support of ruining his companions through treachery. One does not often come across such an interesting psychological study.



At first no one allowed Gossain to guess that his designs were known to all. He too was so stupid as to be unaware of this for quite some time, he thought he was helping the police quite secretly. But when after a few days it was ordered that instead of solitary confinement we would have to live together, then because of this new arrangement we used to meet and talk throughout the day and night, and the thing could not be a secret much longer. At this time one or two of the boys had quarrels with Gossain. From their

language and the unpleasant behaviour of everybody else Gossain could see that his intentions were not unknown to anyone. When later he gave his evidence before the court, some English newspapers reported that this had caused surprise and excitement among the accused persons. Needless to say, this was entirely the reporters' fancy. Days ahead everyone had known the nature of evidence that would be offered. In fact, even the date on which the evidence was given was known from before. At this time an accused went to Gossain and said — "Look, brother, life here is intolerable. I too would like to turn an approver. Please tell Shamsul-Alam to arrange for my release." Gossain agreed to this and after a few days told him that a government note had come to the effect that there was a possibility of favourable consideration of the accused's appeal. After which Gossain suggested to him to eke out some necessary information from Upen and others, for instance, the location of the branches of the secret society and its leaders, etc. The pretended approver was a man with a sense of humour, a lover of fun, and, on Upendra's advice, he supplied a number of imaginary names to Gossain, and said that among the leaders of the secret society were Vishambhar Pillay in Madras, Purushottam Natekar at Satara, Professor Bhatt in Bombay and Krishnajirao Bhao of Baroda. Gossain was delighted with this and passed on this reliable information to the police. And the police too rummaged the whole of Madras, and came across many Pillays, big and small, but not one that was Pillay Vishambhar, not even half a Vishambhar; as for Satara's Purushottam Natekar, he also seemed to keep his identity hidden in deep darkness; in Bombay a certain Professor Bhatt was found no doubt, but he was a harmless person and a loyalist, there was no likelihood of any secret society using him as a cover.... With regard to Bir Krishnajirao Bhao the police perpetrated a hoax. They produced the copy of a telegram sent by some Ghose from the Manicktola Gardens to Krishnajirao Deshpande of Baroda. The people of Baroda did not know of the existence of any one answering to that name, but since the truthful Gossain had spoken of a Krishnajirao Bhao of Baroda, then surely Krishnajirao Bhao and Krishnajirao Deshpande must be the same person. And whether Krishnajirao Deshpande existed or not, the letters mentioned the name of our respected friend, Keshavrao Deshpande. Hence Krishnajirao Bhao and Krishnajirao Deshpande are surely one and the same. From which it followed that Keshavrao Deshpande was a ringleader of the secret conspiracy. Mr. Norton's famous theory was based on such extraordinary inference.

To believe Gossain one had to accept that it was at his suggestion that our solitary confinement was done away with and we were ordered to stay together. He had said that the police had arranged it like this and kept him in the midst of the other accused with the intention of drawing out secret information about the conspiracy. Gossain did not know that his new business was known to everyone long before, when he started to ask questions about those who were engaged in the conspiracy, and the whereabouts of the branches of the secret society, about patrons and contributors, about those who would now be in charge of continuing the secret activities, etc. I have already given examples of the kind of answers he received. But most of Gossain's words were false. Dr. Daly had told us that, by persuading Mr. Emerson, it was he who had brought about this change in our accommodation. Possibly Daly's was the true version; afterwards on

hearing about the change in arrangements the police may have imagined this likely gain.

Be it as it may, everyone, excepting me, was extremely pleased at the change. At that period I was unwilling to be in the midst of a crowd, for my spiritual life, *sadhana*, was proceeding at a rapid pace. I had tasted a little of Equality, Non-attachment and Peace, but these states had not been yet fully stabilised. By being in company, the pressure of other men's thought-waves on my unripe young ideas, this new state of being might suffer, or be even washed away. In fact, it did happen like that. Then I did not understand that for the fullness of my spiritual experience it was necessary to evoke opposite emotions, hence the Inner Guide, *antaryamin*, suddenly deprived me of my dear solitude, flung me into the stream of violent outward activity. The rest of the group went wild with joy. That night the big room in which singers like Hemchandra Das, Sachindra Sen, etc., were staying, most of the accused persons collected there, and no one could sleep till two or three in the morning. The ring of laughter, the endless stream of singing, all the pent-up stories began to flow like swollen rivers during the rainy season. The silent prison reverberated with noise and merriment. We fell asleep but every time we woke up we heard the laughter, the singing, the conversation going on as before. Towards the small hours the stream thinned, the singers too fell asleep. Our ward was silent once again.