



# MOTHER'S INSTRUMENT PRADYOT

- NIRODBARAN



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<b>TWO FRIENDS - STUDENT LIFE</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>PRADYOT'S EARLY LIFE</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>VOYAGE ACROSS THE 'DARK WATERS'</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>JAMSHEDPUR- PRADYOT'S RISE TO FAME</b>	<b>16</b>

## **TWO FRIENDS - STUDENT LIFE**

### **BIRTH OF FRIENDSHIP**

A singular and unaccountable friendship formed itself between Pradyot and me and it lasted for more than seventy years. Strangely romantic is this friendship and worthy of being told about. It had very little outer expression, particularly in the early part of our association. I thought of writing about it some day, but never imagined the circumstances in which I am now impelled, one may even say compelled, to do it. For it is his sudden passing away that is the compulsion.

The year 1915. Both of us were admitted to the same class of the Town Government School at Chittagang in the same year. Pradyot hailed from a small mufassil town and I, from a backward village school. My transfer from a mud-walled house, with rickety benches and a village schoolmaster ruling with a quick rod, to a palatial building brought me wide freedom and release. Pradyot, on the other hand, had a father, well-established as a pleader in the town. Hence it was for him leaving one good station for a better one. We were also of different dispositions in many ways, almost diametrically opposite, one could say. A village boy must bring along with him his untamed vital nature while the town boy, polish; and a calm cheerful air and he had good looks, above all. He was always clad in a simple clean *dhoti* and a plain shirt, going about without foot-wear, whereas I loved a bit of showing off. But these roles were completely reversed in later life, when we had settled in the Ashram. At the earlier time, in Pradyot's case everything was in keeping with his high position outside. We had hardly any common meeting - ground and found our own close comrades according to our natural bent. Besides, being shy, as the Mother observed later, I always waited for others to break the ice. One year passed without

our knowing each other except by facial appearance. He knew of course that I was one of the naughty, unruly boys of the class whom the monitor found it hard to tackle. To my surprise, I discovered at the end of the year that I came second in the annual result and Pradyot stood fast, During the dazzling prize distribution ceremony. I followed him to the dais to receive the prizes.

From the second year neither of us could retain our meritorious position. My nature took a definitely vital turn, inclined as I was towards sports. But I do not know how he lost his nature. But he began to build up his position and had a close fight with another boy who was excellent in English. Eventually he won and ascended to the top of the class by scoring high marks in Mathematics and Mechanics. The rivalry between the two boys was the talk of the school and the teachers expected much from them. I struck a middle path, being a Buddhist by religion, and harmonised my frenzy for sports with application to studies. I excelled in additional subjects like History and Pali; Mathematics was the red herring on my path. Finally while Pradyot stood at the top, I shone as the captain of the school in sports and was not far behind in studies either.

Now, one may ask , where is the room for friendship in all this children's school-day biography ? As I have suggested, it was a semi-romantic - cum - mystic bond that had formed itself and developed through the years. But I cannot recall when and how I felt an attraction for him, nor did I know that he took some interest in me till at a later stage. Through the five years that we passed together, there was very little evidence of friendship as is commonly understood. It may be that his good looks had attracted me but there were students with better looks and nature. " These are all mental reasons ", Sri Aurobindo would say perhaps. When the outer signs were in evidence later on, they were of a very childish nature. For instance, now and then he used to throw out hints through other boys that I should not come to the class chewing betel and should avoid light-hearted class mates. Why should I keep long hair as if to show off my good sportsmanship? - such titbits of moral tags floated to me. I paid no heed to them. Once he even wanted that our relationship should be normal and natural as with other boys, but my shyness combined with a difference in temperament and taste stood in the way.

We had gone in a group for sea-bathing, for instance. He with a few others of his type standing on the shore enjoyed the beauty of the sea, but we of the vital type were swimming on the bosom of the shoreless. Again , from sheer animal exuberance we were climbing up and down a hill whereas he stood watching us from

the top. When we had opted for an excursion into the fairy woodland, we split into two groups, the rowdy and the sober ones. In football contests, he always used to witness our games. His silent presence inspired my play. Though not a player himself, he had a good sense of appreciation. I was most agreeably surprised when after a lapse of nearly half-a-century he cited the instance of a redoubtable player who had scored a free kick goal from near the centre of the field. "Oh", I exclaimed, "you remember it? And what an applause did he receive from the entire crowd!".

Though I was a sportsman, my health used to suffer from chronic malaria. On top of it when down with pneumonia, his visit with a few friends had a tonic effect on my spirits, but there was no vocal exchange.

Though I was a sportsman, my health used to suffer from chronic malaria. On top of it when down with pneumonia, his visit with a few friends had a tonic effect on my spirits, but there was no vocal exchange.

Thus the years rolled on and the final year of the school life was on the threshold. We were to sit for the Matric Examination and then leave the school forever. But Pradyot being of under-age could not appear in the examination: he had to pass one more year with the next junior class. His father, a conscientious man, would not give any false affidavit about the age. The result was not very happy for Pradyot, for being far above the class-mates he lost his inner will and impetus to do his best.

Thus ended our inarticulate mystic bond. I left with a deep admiration and respect for him and it remained almost intact till the last day. But, for the moment, I never knew that we could meet again.

Now, my life took a sudden roundabout turn. God knows how. After the Matric Exam. I joined the non-co-operation movement which had swept our native town. When the movement was suspended. I went to Calcutta for further studies. There again the movement having revived reached its peak. C.R Das was arrested; the call went forth to the students to join the *hartal* in response to which I courted arrest and went to jail. But before doing so, I posted a letter to Pradyot apprising him of my high resolve. This was my first direct communication. I do not know what the fate of the letter was. He in his turn was pursuing his science studies in the local college. He in his turn was pursuing his science studies in the local college. My jail life came to an abrupt end and I sought admission to the same college in the Arts section. I had lost a year. We could meet only for a short while during the recess along with other

students and he was more interested in meeting students of his own calibre. So the gap between us remained as wide as in the school and we followed our own separate interests, but my inner fire was kept alive. When he was appearing in the final I.Sc. examination. I used to visit him and inquire how he had fared, as we had high hopes of his success. Once I happened to visit his house and found that he had been given a neat little room with a small almirah where an entire pocket collection of Hazlitt's works was nicely arranged. 'So he is trying to improve his knowledge of English'. I mused, "and his father had engaged a local professor for that purpose". To me Hazlitt was just a name.

The results of my Intermediate Examination had come out. Now, a most quixotic idea caught hold of me that I should go to England to study Law, though I had neither the means nor the proficiency needed to do so. Even today, when I think of it, I cannot explain what force seized me to play with that fancy, knowing well that it had little chance of fulfilment. But my guardian - I had lost my father - unexpectedly accepted the wild fancy and asked me to make all necessary preparations. The reason of his acceptance was that his daughter, my niece, wanted to go to England for further studies and, she being very young, her father wanted someone to accompany her. And who could be a better companion and guardian than her uncle who was younger than she? But was I not a man after all, though young? God smiled from above, I suppose. We shall see how this event led to very unforeseeable consequences. However, happy beyond measure and almost dancing with joy, I rushed to Calcutta to get the required information regarding the voyage, and there I almost ran into Pradyot. He was moving about with his elder brothers. He too was preparing to go to England to study Engineering. Both of us were frantically busy, and saw very little of each other.



# PRADYOT'S EARLY LIFE

## EVOLUTION OF HIS INNER BEING

I had no personal knowledge of Pradyot's boyhood beyond what I have stated before. We knew that his father was a well-known pleader of the mufassil and later of Chittagong town , a man of reserve and poise and a true Brahmin. Pradyot was the fourth son of a large family. His two elder brothers were also students of our school. We had heard that Pradyot was the dearest of all the brothers and a great deal was expected of him. Perhaps the family environment prevented our acquaintance from coming too close. The father was otherwise a large-hearted man, and had given food and shelter in his village home to scholars of poor means before he had settled in the town. If he heard of a student needing some help, he would pick him up and leave him in the care of Pradyot's mother, saying, "Here is another child added to your family. Do as best you can". The mother obeyed his will. All the male members used to take food together and it was Pradyot's part to wash their dishes, it seems. One can easily understand how the seed of Pradyot's future was sown in an early soil.

In the mufassil school the two brothers used to be in the same class and Pradyot, the junior, was always coming first. Once there was an exception and he felt so sore about it that he could not sleep at night. Suddenly he saw that his mother was sitting quietly by his side. All his grief melted away. Among the brothers he was supposed to be the most intelligent, and because of his habit of monitoring others, he was nick-named 'munsif'. As a hobby he played village cricket and even indulged in angling. One day he caught a big fish from the pond ; a tussle went on between the two with the result that he was pulled into the deep waters and was gasping. A passer by rescued him and led him to his father from whom he received a gentle slap by way of rebuke. He thought, " what a nice world are we living in ! Instead of a patting, I get a good slap. Where is justice ?"

A tailor was making coats for all the brothers. According to the current fashion, the coats except, that of little Pradyot, had a linear cut in the back-part. He demanded, "Do the same with my coat". The tailor naturally sent him off. Wounded in his pride, he said to himself, "I shall do it myself. It is not so difficult, after all". Not so sure, however, he went to the kitchen, and cut the coat with the help of a household vegetable-cutting knife. But, as expected, the line swerved and the threads were all laid bare. " Ah, I am in a mess now," he said to himself. But he must find a way out. He had a sudden brain wave. He slid out some thread from an old sari of his mother and tried to stitch the breach. He failed but realised that the whole thing had turned a capital joke. Now there was no escape. He had to use the coat; he did so, covering the stitch with an umbrella. Some village folk, noticing this novel use of the umbrella, asked, " What's the matter, Khokababu? The umbrella is in the wrong place." Khokababu murmured to himself, 'How will they understand where the shoe pinches?

From his very childhood he had to pass through an austere training from his father. Sleeping on a rough bed, sometimes without pillows ; wearing plain but clean dress, going about without footwear; during the thread ceremony , enduring hunger and other brahmanic disciplines till one day, when he was eleven years, there was severe bleeding from his nose and all hard tapasya ended with this reward! Now the pendulum swung the other way; plenty of clothes, varieties of fruit and other replenishments to make amends, as it were, began to flow in.

Pradyot's father was, as we can perceive, an orthodox Brahmin and a worshipper of Kali. Pradyot had to procure red *Javas* for the worship. They had also the idols of Radha and Krishna in their house. One day the idol of Radha was missing. A search began and it was found under Pradyot's pillow. The exquisite figure of the idol tempted him to appropriate it, but Radha was not to be so easily captured. He would, however, facetiously say, "See , I have been after Radha since my childhood and my horoscope name in Keshta (Krishna)". We had, one year, an inter- school theatrical performance. Our school staged "The God of the devotee" and Pradyot played the main role of the devotee. He was probably twelve or so at that time. The theatre hall was packed. When the play ended there was a thunderous applause and the older students, jumping to the stage, hugged Pradyot, lifted him to their shoulders and began to dance in a jubilant manner. At another time, when he was but a child, he was given the role of a dead child. The naughty boys of the village whispered to him that even though dead, a dead person moves

his legs. Poor fellow thus beguiled, started moving them and a rollicking laughter burst out from the audience. Though Pradyot's father was an orthodox brahmin, he was not dogmatic by any means. It was said that when the priests refused to function in the marriage of the poet Nabin Sen's son, because he had crossed Kala Pani (dark waters), Pradyot's father came forward and saved the situation. For this priestly act, he became known as Purohit. Again, when his own son after returning from England, married a Bengali Christian lady, the father said, " Well, he is old enough to know his own good ; what have I to say in the matter ? Had he married an English girl instead it would have been worse. At least here is a Bengali girl." Later on, Pradyot's parents passed some days in his own house and had meals with the Christian wife, cooked by a Muslim boy! Pradyot had a Muslim student friend who had free access to the house. Moreover, when once a big *yajna* was being performed in his uncle's house, Pradyot driven by compelling circumstances arrived there with his Muslim friend at night. The orthodox uncle did not hesitate to serve the Muslim boy and even washed his dishes with his own hands, because the guest is Narayana ( God ) !

This was the setting in which Pradyot's life took shape for the future.

# VOYAGE ACROSS THE 'DARK WATERS'

## GROWTH OF FRIENDSHIP

Pradyot's decision to go abroad was taken very suddenly, after he had already got himself admitted to St. Xavier's college, Calcutta, much against his father's avowed intention. It seems he took the help of a renowned Tantric Sadhu to win over his father who had great respect for him. The father had to yield, on condition that he should marry before he started. The father had a fear that the son would bring back with him an English wife. That was the current apprehension. Pradyot was put to a hard test. He had never met his father face to face so far. "Have you anything to say?" asked the father in a distant voice. "I won't marry," was the curt reply. The father, after a pause, relented and added, "Very well, let it be so". What a relief it was to the son!

I remember I had to pass through a similar ordeal but it ended in a farce, thanks to a lucky intervention.

It so happened that I sailed before him from Rangoon along with my niece. After a couple of months I got news that he had started. I went from Edinburgh to London to receive him, but missed the timing. He had already reached Edinburgh by a different route and, following my address, asked my landlady, "Is Mr. Talukdar here?" "No", she replied, "he has gone to London to fetch a friend coming from India". "Well, I am the friend," he added. Another friend wired to me the news and I hastened back.

Now we were no longer two former shy birds of Chittangong Valley. The wide summer air - he arrived in the summer seasons - blowing from the Scottish hills had swept away the veils of shyness and I found the tongue. We started at once for Glasgow, for the session has already started. Since I had come earlier I had better knowledge of the people and their ways. The first problem was to hunt for a lodging. Glasgow, unlike Edinburgh, was a very congested commercial city and the people seemed to be esspolished and always in a hurry. Walking down the streets, we began to watch both sides for any placard hanging against the window-panes and notifying "Apartments vacant". After a few rebuffs, one landlady accommodated us. We passed the night in one bed, something unimaginable indeed and talked out the night, pouring our laden heart from under the cosy rugs - a fascinating Summer's Tale till the goodness of sleep closed our lids with her light touch.

Next morning after a hurried breakfast we made our way to the University situated upon a mound. Leaving him to fend for himself I returned to join my classes. During Christmas. I paid him a visit and found to my pleasant surprise that he had

installed himself in so short a time in a nice room and that the old Mrs. Widow, landlady of the house, had as it were found a lost son and was pouring all her famished fondness upon him. The lion's share of all the eatables were reserved for him; the other Bengali boarder friends had to be contented with merely their quota. He was her companion both for evening walks and for errands. Meek and docile Pradyot kept rhythm with her steps and listened to her jabbering all the way. This was a new aspect of Pradyot, hard to believe. Across the dining table we would cut jokes with him and admonish, "Beware, Pradyot ; this smacks of something more than it seems". He would return a disarming smile. Meanwhile she had discovered that he was her daughter's husband in another life - fancy a Scottish woman believing in previous births! In fact Pradyot had in his nature a child-like simplicity and an obliging disposition which endeared him to all who came in contact with him. This is what is known as the psychic element which proved his great asset. When he shifted to other places, there too he was on good terms with the landlady. Endowed with an accommodating nature, he could put up stoically with any inconvenience and never grumbled like us about discomforts. Once my landlady, when I complained of feeling cold at night because of her stingy coal-supply, added one or two small pieces to the dying fire but uttered cheekily, "You have your mind elsewhere, not on the book. That is why you feel cold". Glasgow people , however , are said to be more humane, though not polished, than the people of Edinburgh. But the entire Scottish race is proverbially close-fisted.

Another trait in Pradyot's nature was his love of company. He was fond of moving about with friends and admirers and during leisure time would organise cultural activities. The Mother said something to the same effect. Studies were not his only pursuits in which he was already brilliant; he had besides a keen intellect that would inspire authority and confidence wherever he moved. He was also very generous and helped me in times of need.

I have anticipated a good deal. Let us resume our thread. In the second year of my stay, I received a call from my niece in London for a trip to the continent. I invited Pradyot to join us. He agreed. When we arrived in London, my niece accepted him at once as her younger brother. While the trip was being arranged. Pradyot said to me, "Let us visit Croydon aerodrome and have a view of aeroplane flights". In the twenties, aeroplane service had just begun between London and France. When after a long journey by bus we arrived, there was no aeroplane on the ground; one was due to arrive in a short time, we were told. None came and we returned, disappointed. Next day we sauntered along the banks of the Thames on the opposite side of the House of Parliament, the Westminster Abbey. We were too young to appreciate the sight of London depicted by Wordsworth in his famous sonnet. It was not early morning either when the mighty heart of London was 'still'! With his own camera I took a snap of Pradyot leaning against the embankment.

One further interesting item was our meeting an Australian lady occultist at the breakfast table. She suddenly announced to us, 'You are studying medicine ; I see a figure behind you dissecting a body. And behind you, buildings and constructions. You will be an engineer'. We were naturally impressed.

We were now ready for the trip. But to my surprise Pradyot backed out and said, "I would rather go back. I have lessons to prepare". It was a sore disappointment. However, my niece and her two senior women friends and myself formed a team. I was adopted by them as their young *mama*. A few hours' journey across the Channel and we lighted upon the dreamland that was France. I had at once a feeling as if I had escaped from an insular prison into a larger air of freedom, beauty and romantic atmosphere. It turned out to be a fateful trip for me.

A few months after my return , the two adopted nieces came to Edinburgh to pursue their B.Ed course in the University. During the vacation, they proposed to visit the birth-place of the Scottish national poet Burns. As we had to pass through Glasgow. I wrote to Pradyot to join us. He had already met the ladies in London . We started by bus for Ayr. Reaching there, we were shown a long cottage like structure called Burns' Cottage where his works and various relics were on display. I do not remember more than that. The ladies being more conversant took a good deal of interest in the exhibition. Burns' immortal poem, 'O my love is a red, red rose' was not known to me , nor to Pradyot, I presume. But we realised how popular the poet was by the crowd of visitors pouring in by buses and other vehicles. What we enjoyed most was the setting; the natural scene, and the lunch served on an open green lawn on the shore of the North Sea which was billowing by. Pradyot ingratiated himself into their sisterly hearts and was christened their brother. The same afternoon we returned, Pradyot waving us a warm send-off.

After the adopted nieces had left, my own niece came to continue her studies in Edinburgh. Now Pradyot became a regular visitor and used to pass frequent week-ends with us. A sweet bond was soon cemented between them and became an additional attraction of his coming. Later on, when we had rented a small flat, one day Pradyot knocked at our door. When I opened it, I was surprised to see a big company, one of them holding in his hand a fowl which they had bought on the way. They had walked 40 miles from Glasgow. Youthful zeal indeed ! My niece, a good cook, made an excellent fowl curry and the young gourmets gulped the curry with a tremendous relish, applauding all the while the rare native taste in a foreign land where mutton chops and cutlets pass for good dishes. My niece became at once their dear *didi* and was invited to their place. We paid the return visit and they handsomely paid off their debt by arranging a trip to the Scottish Lake District. Like the English Lakes, the Scottish ones also were famous for their beauty, particularly Loch Lomond, while Loch Ness had acquired a wide reputation for sheltering a supposed monster. We started in a car and when after driving through the High lands

and Low lands we reached the place, a magnificent panorama stretched out before our charmed eyes, particularly the far flung Lomond ensconced by the surrounding hills. We adventured along the bank through thickets and tangled wood following a pedestrian route for miles, a band of Bengali youth and a pretty Bengali girl adding to the gaiety by her natural buoyancy. The jocund company was at the crest of their babble, no wonder. At the end of the long tour- above, a blue sky ; below, green foliage, a winding road in front, a five-mile walk and then to dinner - a la Hazlilt. There waited for us a sumptuous lunch in the Lake restaurant. Though the menu fell far short of Bengali taste, hunger and jovial spirit were the best sauce. The Scotch waiter gaped in wonder at one young lady dressed in a colourful sari, she being the centre of interest of all the boys. The trip was a real treat in a romantic setting.

Some months later, Dilip Roy paid a visit to Edinburgh and was our guest. We had made his acquaintance in Paris. Pradyot arrived at our call. We went round visiting the historical sites ; one of them was an excursion to the Firth of Forth. The bridge, an engineering feat across the river Forth was the tourist attraction. Again, the natural setting around was our chief interest. On the other side of the river was an undulating plain stretching towards Dundee ; on this side ,the river was flanked by a woodland. Between the two , the river 'glided at its own sweet will' amid a meditative hush. We made our foray through the woods, beneath the 'green robed senators'- the oaks, poplars, beeches, etc. and through tangled pathless wilds till we came to an opening, We sat there and took tea. I took a photograph of the group with Pradyot's camera which he bequeathed to me as a souvenir. Dilip was of course a company by himself, one equal to a hundred, as a Bengali adage has it. His magnetic personality, lovely voice and jovial temper kept us charmed with his talk and threw on us a Coleridgean fascination and turned us at once into his fervent admirers. It was then that we heard from him about Sri Aurobindo and his famous interview with Sri Aurobindo. Our fate and fortune were forged at that moment in the occult world. But the irony of it was that both my niece and Dilip left the Ashram while Pradyot and myself linked together till the end. Yet, they were the most interested and were the first to join the Ashram.

Now to close the happy reminiscence. Pradyot finished his four years' course in three years with distinction and returned home. It seems such exceptions were not repeated since. I returned after about six months. He came to receive me at the station. Both of us started for Dacca to meet my niece. There she had got a Government job ; from there, we sailed for Chittagong, our native town. Pradyot entertained us with a grand dinner at his place. We came to know his mother for the first time. A true Bengali mother, whom you accept at once as your own mother.

Work now called and divided us. I plumped for Burma, Pradyot for Jamshedpur and a 'salt estranging sea' lay between us without almost a scrap of communication till I joined the Ashram in 1933.

# JAMSHEDPUR- PRADYOT'S RISE TO FAME

## A LULL IN OUR FRIENDSHIP

When I returned to India months after Pradyot's arrival, he was still looking for some job. He told me that he had applied to the Tatas in Jamshedpur and was waiting for a reply. I knew nothing further, for, as I have said, I soon left for Burma and our communication ceased altogether till one day I received a telegram from him asking for some financial help. Promptly did I send a small sum that I could afford. It came as a great help to him, he told me afterwards. That is how I knew that he was in Jamshedpur, but about his job and pay I learnt only when I met him at Pondicherry. That he had to face much hardship to start with was never mentioned and I too did not enquire about it. I gathered from other intimate associates of his at Calcutta that there was a black Police report against him as a Swadeshi, putting Government jobs out of his reach. He had therefore joined the Tata Company on a monthly salary of Rs.200/-, had to sleep on a very ordinary cot strung with ropes, wooden packing boxes served as his dining table, and tin chairs to sit on. This was all the furniture! From this lowly position he rose to the status of a superintendent of Electrical Engineering and Construction by sheer merit and had a beautiful bungalow in an aristocratic quarter with all other amenities added to it. On my part, after three years of medical practice I suddenly left for Pondicherry and made the Ashram my permanent home. My niece had already done so before me. She had a big part to play in my following in her footsteps. Similarly, as soon as I had settled myself, my first move was to rope in Pradyot. I invited him to come for a *darshan* and informed him of my niece's presence here so that it might be an additional enticement. He responded, but for a short stay. The Ashram rules being strict at that time, our association could not be as intimate as in Scotland. He had Sri Aurobindo's *darshan*. It seems that he stood before him a bit too long, he could not move and Sri Aurobindo had to make a sign. When he was leaving the Ashram, I made one request to him that he should try to send some token offering every month, believing that it would ultimately do him good. I had learnt that to be able to help the Ashram in some way or other was not a small privilege. Pradyot complied with my request. I used to write to him, send blessings, but he evinced no further interest. I concluded that he came for our sake only. I wrote to Sri Aurobindo to that effect and added, "Is there then any use communicating with him?" He replied in one of his cryptic veins, "I don't know; some people say that everything one does in this world is of some use or other, known or unknown. Otherwise it wouldn't be done." There was a quickening



of Pradyot's interest after this. An occult effect ? For I did not convey Sri Aurobindo's comment by any means. He even sent a long Bengali poem for the Master's perusal. " It has an obvious Tagorean influence, as you say," commented Sri Aurobindo, "but otherwise quite good" His poetic venture ceased after this. for by nature he was a man of practical imagination, though he knew English and Bengali very well indeed. Perhaps my own poems which I used to send him inspired him to compose the poem.

Meanwhile he suddenly got married to a Bengali Christian lady whom we had known in England and who was a School Inspectress at Dacca. He informed Sri Aurobindo of it. At this time, he began to suffer from gastric pain due to, he considered, severe fasting during the Non-cooperation Movement . This also he wrote to Sri Aurobindo. One night during an acute attack he dreamt that Mother Kali took him on her lap and rocked him like a child. We see then that he had resumed his contact and the interest began to grow by and by.

Along with it, his innate professional qualities began to emerge and his merit came to be recognised. He soon rose to the position of a Superintendent and in the absence of the TISCO Chief Engineer., acted on his behalf. Later he himself became the Chief Engineer. As a cultured man and an efficient engineer his name spread all around. In Jameshedpur Mr. Bhattacharya was the talk of the town as a remarkably gifted engineer. He was also very popular with the workers of his sympathy with their toiling and care-worn life and their just demands . Once there was a big strike. The agitated workers turned violent and this led to destruction of machines and furniture and even to bloodshed. Pradyot appeared at that crucial moment on the scene of trouble. No sooner had the workers noticed him than they rushed and cried, " Babu, leave this place at once". As he would not, they simply carried him out bodily and put him in the car outside. When later Pradyot related the story to the Mother , she said, " As he would not, they simply carried him out bodily and put him in the car outside. When later Pradyot related the story to the Mother , she said, "They love you". "Yes Mother, but tomorrow perhaps the same people will hate me, " Pradyot rejoined. "That's true", the Mother added.

At this time he received a telegraphic summons from his father to start at once for Chittagong, from where they were to go on a pilgrimage to Benares. The son was embarrassed for he had not much faith in these pilgrimages. He thought, " But why should I be needed at all when there are other brothers to do the job ? He could not, disobey. So a large family party with the father at the head started on the journey. Pradyot had to dip in the Ganges with them and putting on new dhoti, chaddar etc. dress himself as a brahmin, but he went no further. He refused to enter the temple; to make a show of *bhakti* before others did not suit his temperament. Leaning against Shiva's bull in the courtyard, he began to read a newspaper. He was struck by a piece of news which he had dreamt of two weeks earlier. Just then appeared

before him a lady - fair- complexioned freshly bathed in the Ganges, clothed in a red-border sari and a *kamandalu* in her hand. Almost in a commanding tone she asked , " My son, take me to the temple," Pradyot, taken aback asked , " Are you asking me ?" "Yes, you."

"But I am quite new here, I don't know the whereabouts. Could you not ask some volunteer?"

"No, it is you I want."

Well, Pradyot could not ignore her and, being an England-returned gent, a sense of chivalry goaded him on . When he entered the temple, he looked around to see if his father or others were near about. He thought, " Since I have come, let me finish it with a *pranam*." Rising up, he looked for the lady ; she was nowhere to be seen. What a surprise! He came out quickly, evading his family's glance.

After years when he recounted the incident to the Mother, she simply smiled. He understood that he was graced with the vision of Mother Annapurna. Tradition has it that anybody coming to Benares and not having the *darshan* of Viswanath, the presiding Deity of Benares, incurs the displeasure of the divine Mother, Annapurna.

Now he was coming to the Ashram on short visits. Once I accommodated him in my room in the Dispensary. One day he asked me to my surprise. " I want a pen used by Sri Aurobindo in exchange for my own. Do you think my wish will be granted? I hesitated and then replied, "Well, I may ask the Mother." Happily the wish was granted. It seemed he had kept the pen as a precious souvenir till his last days. He used always to come dressed like a saheb and put on my *dhotis* and shirts during his short stays. During the period of the accident to Sri Aurobindo I was busy throughout the day; so we would meet only at night and chat for some time with Sisir keeping us company. After finishing our dinner we would part. I noticed at that time that he was very sparing in his meals, for any excess would upset his stomach. His wife now began to turn towards the Ashram and on one occasion stayed long during Pradyot's absence from Calcutta. The Mother accommodated her in a spacious house near the Ashram, the Sri Aurobindo Society's present centre. I had frequent invitations to her place. She was a very fine, cultured lady, sweet and motherly, and used to talk proudly about Pradyot's immense possibilities. As Pradyot's contact with the Mother began to develop, he started consulting her in his professional matters and asking for her decisions. He wanted to leave the Tatas and come back to Calcutta, a job there having fallen vacant. Before this, he had often intended to leave since the authorities refused to consider his just claims to further promotion. For instance, though he had been appointed Chief Engineer, they would not grant him the salary due to the post, their stupid reason being that he had already acted as Chief Engineer without demanding or getting the requisite salary and he was now doing the same job. In fact they were not pleased with his unusual popularity with the

workers. But the Mother always advised him patience and asked him to 'play for time'. Eventually she said, "Give them an ultimatum".

During his sojourn in Jamshedpur, he formed with the Bengali officers and inhabitants an Ashram Centre. Engineers, hospital workers, teachers, businessmen etc. became members owing to Pradyot's influence as a man and as a high officer. His wife joined him from Dacca after her retirement. After every monthly or special sitting the members were entertained at his place with refreshments. To every member he was Pradyotda and his wife, Ranidi. They began to visit the Ashram in groups, families or singly, and send offerings addressed to me. I also became known to them. Pradyot rented permanently a house called Jamshedpur House for their residence. Even now the house is kept up. One senior engineer was inspired by his contact to settle for good with his family in the Ashram. He said to me, " A man like him is a rare find. Feeble and generous by nature, he, an efficient worker and capable engineer without any sense of superiority or stand-offishness, made himself lovable to all and sundry. In Jamshedpur, Calcutta, and the D.V.C. he has worked with such an extraordinary dexterity that even after relinquishing his job, he was asked to come back. Quite a good number of his assistants have got good jobs elsewhere and all are grateful to him. Truly , he was a remarkable man and a genius."

I believe that many of his fine aristocratic ( or should I say, democratic ?) qualities , his mental largeness, vital push and thoroughness, aesthetic taste and physical endurance were the orchids of the foreign climate which he had absorbed while in England. This suggests that all his good qualities were due to his stay in England.

## CALCUTTA

The ultimatum had no effect. Pradyot resigned. Dr. B.C.Roy who was then the Chief Minister of Bengal appointed him in 1948 as the Chief Engineer of the West Bengal Electricity Development Directorate. That department was in a moribund state owing to lack of efficient officers. Dr. Roy was very happy with the choice; his shrewd insight found in Pradyot the right man.

The year 1943 has a significance. Before that year, the British Government used to keep a secret dossier in which reports and records of patriotic people were preserved. Pradyot had a dossier against him because of which he could not get any Government job after his return from England. Now after the freedom of India things had changed the other way apropos of which Sri Aurobindo remarked, 'That seems to be a qualification now'.

Pradyot worked in the Electrical Department for a short duration, but brought about a big change in administration and left a distinct stamp of his efficiency and experience. One notable instance was regarding the West Bengal Government's North Calcutta Electrification scheme. The Central Government approved it. But Pradyot found that the scheme was absurd and he gave an alternative proposal which was accepted. I refrain from giving technical details. They would be irrelevant here.

A quirk of fate brought Pradyot to work in Calcutta under the very man whose capricious authority he had to work under in Jamshedpur.

After he had settled in Calcutta, he came in contact with the Ashram disciples, and the Path Mandir. Satya Bose, its Secretary, recalling Pradyot's association with the Path Mandir said " The Institution existed only in name , there was hardly any organisation. A few members used to assemble now and then for talk. One day, Pradyot made a sudden appearance in the meeting and realised at once its non-descript condition. In no time he built out of his amorphous body a well-knit and ordered organisation. Dr. Sanyal was then the President and Pradyot became the Vice-President. Sanyal's function ended with financial help, Pradyot was the backbone and organising brain. It was a great pleasure to work with him. He was elected President after Sanyal's retirement. His house was open like a guest-house and we would always return from it with our palate gratified. Ranidi, his wife, was a truly cultured Bengali sister, quiet amicable and hospitable."

As I have mentioned before, his love of company was a constant endowment of his nature. Wherever he had been, his leisure hours were enjoyed in talk, witty

levities of a cultured society, ending with sweet refreshments. His birthday was observed in a royal style; from morning to night an incessant stream of visitors, friends and invited guests arriving with presents and departing with the reception of his large hearted laughter. Even the workers of the factory and servants were not forgotten. His birthday in the Ashram was verily a gala day.

Mr. Goklany, a long-standing intimate friend of Pradyot's said that in his service life he helped friends with liberal loans which were not expected to be repaid. Once he offered like Goldsmith his warm shawl to a beggar in England trembling with cold. His heart easily melted at the sight of others' sufferings.

# DAMODAR VALLEY PROJECT

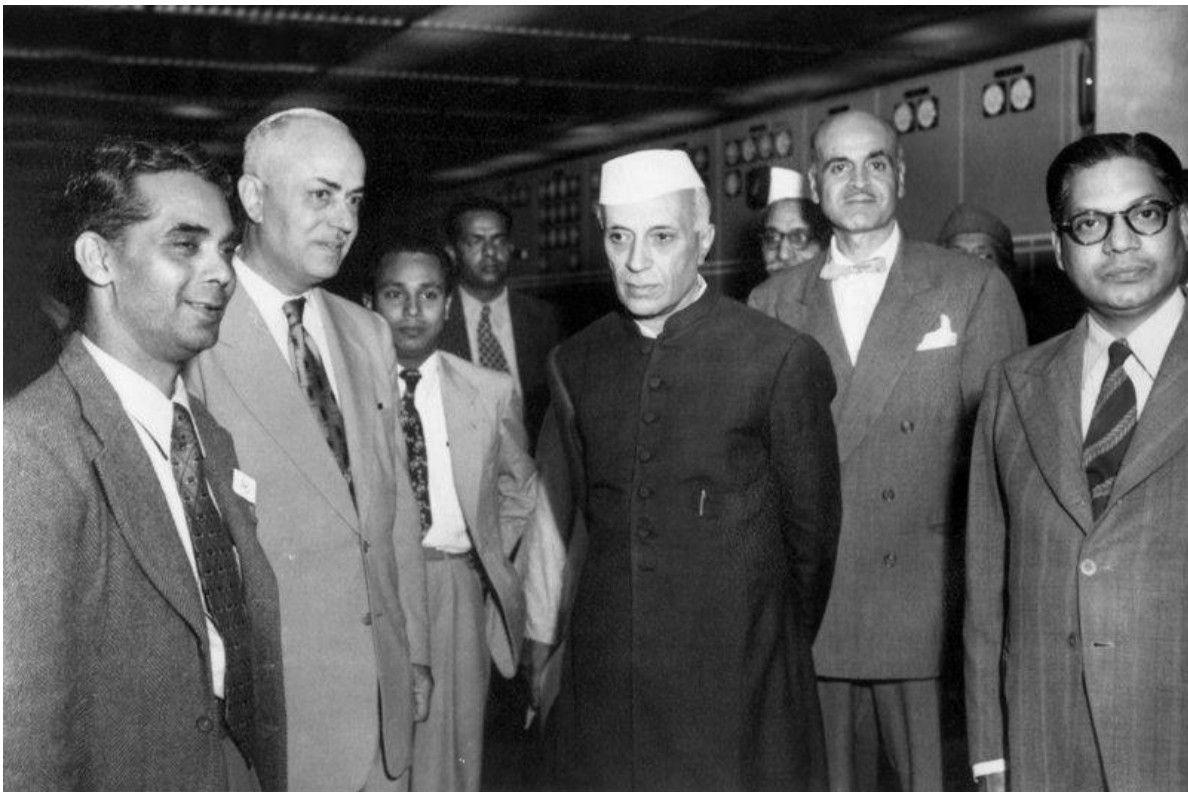
The post of the Chief Electrical Engineer as first sanctioned by the D.V.C. had to be filled up. Dr. B. C. Roy said, " Pradyot is my own man. He should get the job. Without him, the West Bengal Electrical Development schemes will not be a success". When he appeared for the interview, he found quite a number of candidates, one of them being an Engineer of repute, but eventually he was selected and was strongly recommended. It so happened that while waiting to be called for interview he found a book on Engineering lying on the table. Out of curiosity he turned over the pages and finished reading it. In the interview most of the questions that were asked came luckily from the book he had just read through. So, the test was a walk-over. When he came out of the interview, he found to his surprise that the book had vanished .

The engineers of the D.V.C. were very happy to learn that Mr. Bhattacharya was coming there as the Chief Electrical Engineer. His name had already become a legend. The Bokaro Thermal Power Project under D.V.C. fell on his shoulders. Bokaro, with the most sophisticated technology, was then the biggest Power-House in South-east Asia and the project bears a splendid testimony to Pradyot's constructive genius. Pandit Nehru came to open the plant. He was extremely satisfied with it and its clean and tidy environment. He exclaimed, "I cannot imagine that such a well-maintained clean Power Station is possible". It was on the 21st February 1953 that the opening took place. Ordinarily seen, the selection of the date came by sheer accident. But did it really ? The date marks the Mother's seventy-sixth birthday.

During this period Pradyot kept close touch with the Mother and solicited her blessings and counsel in all problems. Once faced with a serious problem, he came and sought for an interview . The Mother said to me. "Do one thing. I am very busy. Bring him to the tennis ground. After the play, I shall see him there". I did as I was told. Pradyot was in European dress and carried his official valise. The Mother selected an odd place. Just at one end of the tennis court near the baseline she sat on a chair, Pradyot sitting by her side on the ground. We players felt very much embarrassed lest any shot should hit the Mother, but she paid no attention to it. We were finally obliged to suspend the play. And that was exactly what she wanted. She worked it out in her own 'naughty' way. I was quite familiar with her divine oddities. I had no other choice than to take my seat besides them and listen to their technical jargon. Pradyot ferretted out a photograph from his valise. It was the picture of the Bokaro Thermal Power of his own making. It still hangs in his house and he would exhibit to visitors his proud masterpiece. The interview was over and Pradyot was satisfied. He had brought a short film on the D.V.C. The Mother asked him if he was there in the picture. If so, she would like to see it. So, next day the film was shown in the playground and since it was a short film, the Mother asked him to speak to the Ashram people about his work. She was

very pleased to hear his speech. " It is an admirably clear, concise and pointed version", was her comment.

Once the D.V.C. had a confrontation with the Central Government. It wanted that it should supply electricity to Calcutta, an area outside the jurisdiction of the D.V.C. , from its Power House; therefore the Central Government had to sanction it. But it refused to do so; the Central Government Committee said that it would be a very expensive project. The D.V.C. representatives were called to Delhi, since they pressed their demand. The D.V.C. wanted Pradyot to go with them; he initially demurred but gave in at last. But he must consult the Mother first, he said. Mr. C.D. Deshmukh was the then Finance Minister of the Government of India. Many technical subjects were raised by the government to which the D.V.C. member found no satisfactory answer. Pradyot would not intervene in spite of being repeatedly goaded on. At last he spoke , " Will you please tell us what will be the cost of electricity per unit for D.V.C. supply at Calcutta? The Government members were non-plussed at this unexpected query. Then he added, You have called this meeting and, without troubling yourselves, with this practical aspect, you have decided against the sanction".



Pradyot with Pandit Nehru, Harry Kuljian, Sadhan Dutt and others at the opening of the Bokaro Thermal Power Station

This was Pradyot's forte. He could turn the tables on an unwary opponent by such unexpected moves. He was, by the way, an excellent chess- player. A through mastery over a subject, an acute and calm intellect favoured by flashes of intuition were the powers with which he commanded extraordinary success. Here, in the Ashram , he was the man sought for when any serious decision had to be taken. Once when Mr. Deshmukh visited the Ashram , he met Pradyot and said, "Oh, you are here ! I still remember how, when you came to Delhi , you thumped the table and demanded, I want money, and the money was granted".

There was a talk of Pradyot's going to France. The Mother, when referred to, asked, "Oh, he wants to go France"? Hearing this, he came to see her. She kept some papers and files ready for him, but he at once blurted out, " Mother ! I am not going." he had felt in the Mother's laconic question a vibration of her disapproval. The Mother then explained to him at length why she disapproved. She said that in such instances it entailed a lot of inner work for her; she had to guard and protect the person against subtle influences of dark forces of which he would not be aware. He would have lost much that he had received of spiritual refinement. Thus Pradyot had to beat a retreat and go back to his work. But the work lost its charm for him; he would prefer to do the Mother's work in the Ashram. The Mother, apprised of his intention, replied sharply, "But who says you are not doing my work?" She told some of us, "What work befitting his position can I give him here?" On the other hand, his wife was not yet ready for the entire plunge. A few years later, however, the Mother herself called both Dr. Sanyal and Pradyot. These two distinguished professional experts left their friends, admirers and colleagues, who were completely bewildered, when they responded to the call, Dr. B.C.Roy, the Chief Minister, had to meet a barrage of questions in the Assembly over Pradyot's resignation. He had a hard time to convince the members that nothing could be done by him. Pradyot was going to serve the Mother at Pondicherry.

Now that the merger of Pondicherry with India had taken place, the Mother perhaps had envisaged the possibility of the Ashram technicians taking part in the Pondicherry administration. Already Pavitra's (the Ashram Electrical Engineer) service had been requisitioned for planning the Pondicherry Park, and Pradyot, after he had settled here in 1955 was made the adviser of the Pondicherry Government Electrical Department. He had to pass two years in a rented house by the sea-side; then when a home was specially made ready for him, he shifted to it. A fine spacious building, it was used formerly as the office of the British Consul and hence afterwards named Consul House. The upper storey was given to Pradyot. It has a very large terrace overlooking the sea, a fit place for our rendezvous. One well furnished room was meant to be used as his office. When everything was ready , the Mother herself came and conducted the opening ceremony in the presence of Pavitra, Nolini, Amrita and other notable workers. She inspected the entire house and was satisfied with the accommodation. At another place on the same street Sanyal was given another large building with a big garden ( for Sanyal's hobby was gardening, particularly



Rose-culture), and the sea in front. The Mother knew very well the inner and outer needs of each person and gave due regard to them.

Let me append here some excerpts from an article written by Mr. C.D. Ayyar, formerly Superintending Engineer, D.V.C. one of Pradyot's subordinate officers in the D.V.C. They will demonstrate very clearly what I have tried to describe from a second-hand knowledge.

## REMINISCENCES OF A SMILING LION

MAY 1952. Board Room at the office of the Damodar Valley Corporation, Calcutta. I was one of the candidates called for interview for the post of Senior Project Engineers. There were several "big shots" in the room. But the one who shot out tricky but intelligent questions was young and handsome, dressed in immaculate white. After the interview I asked one of the candidates, who the young handsome man was. He looked at me as if I had committed blasphemy, and added, 'Don't you know Mr. P.K. Bhattacharya, the renowned engineer?' I was lucky to be selected. Thus began my association with Mr. P.K. Bhattacharyya, which was to last for thirty three years till the Mother took him away.

To me, P.K.B., as we called him lovingly, was a divine human being so intimately bound to the Mother that it is difficult to tell them apart.

To begin from the beginning. We were a batch of Senior Engineers abounding in "Wisdom" and "Engineering knowledge", so smug and self-sufficient that we considered our opinion the "last word" on any topic under the sun. Little did we know then that the small frame of P.K.B. housed an intellectual giant. We were to find our levels soon. Our first encounter with P.K.B began when he issued orders forbidding engineers of our ranks to have direct discussions with the Company's representatives. When his second order asking us to get our letters monitored through his technical P.A. followed, we decided that this was the limit. We felt humiliated and wanted to rebel. Burning with anger, we proceeded in a batch to P.K.B.'S room to "have it out" with him. His technical P.A. let us in. We were received cordially by the smiling P.K.B., so full of charm. Over cups of coffee, P.K.B. explained in a few clear words the significance of those orders. At that time, the D.V.C. was placing orders worth several crores of rupees with many firms. There was the question of ensuring of fair deal and convincing the public of our accountability. We junior engineers were not that experienced to deal with major problems independently . We saw sense in P.K.B's method of working and decided to cooperate. P.K.B. assumed full responsibility for all his actions. He never believed in passing on the blame. Throughout his professional career there is not a single instance of a junior having been let down by him. What began as an encounter with P.K.B became goodwill and understanding of a lifetime.

All the officers and staff of the D.V.C. held P.K.B. in the highest regard. His achievements during 1952 to 1955 bogs one's imagination. Since then, P.K.B. is a byword in engineering circles. As long as P.K.B. was in the D.V.C. everything went off like clockwork.

P.K.B.'s period in the D.V.C. can truly be classed as a golden era. Those of us who had worked at that time and witnessed the subsequent developments know this for certain. I also know that it was the grace of the Mother which enabled P.K.B. to achieve impossible.

It will not be incorrect to say that P.K.B. 'took' the Mother to the D.V.C. and to Calcutta. We knew that he lived the Mother in all he did. Many of us did not understand the significance of his action. Some of us purchased a set of books comprising *The Life Divine. Essays on the Gita. The Synthesis of Yoga and The Human Cycle*. I glanced through a few pages of *The Life Divine*. I found the reading tough and closed the book as I had no patience. The Ashram Bulletin started coming in. This created more interest to study Sri Aurobindo's philosophy.

P.K.B.'s power for collecting donations for the Ashram was extraordinary. Only the Mother could have bestowed such power. Donors came forward to contribute thousands of rupees willingly. This was handy as the Ashram was badly in need of funds at that time. Many of us have witnessed such miracles time and again. Everything looks simple after the job is done. Only those present at the time of execution can fully appreciate the difficulties.

P.K.B. had different ways of tackling different persons for collecting funds for the Mother. There was one S.C. Ghosh, ex-superintending engineer, D.V.C., who telephoned P.K.B. while the latter had come to Maithon. Mr. Ghosh said that his heart was pining to see P.K.B. and he invited him to his residence. P.K.B. did some quick thinking. Meeting Mr. Ghosh meant driving for over 50 miles. P.K.B. accepted the invitation on condition that Sri Ghosh would contribute Rs.500/- for the Mother. Mr. Ghosh agreed and P.K.B. returned from the visit with a cheque for Rs.500/-.

P.K.B. was never alone at his residence on Lansdowne Road, Calcutta. Visitors would stream in both in the mornings and in the evenings. Everyone received equal courtesy and kindness. With visitors pouring in it will remain a mystery how P.K.B. did his work.

P.K.B. sought the Mother's help in all trying situations. Engineering problems were no exception. He received the Mother's grace in full measure even while living in Calcutta. The commissioning at the Bokaro Thermal Power Station was an important landmark in the technical development of the nation. This was acclaimed as an engineering feat by no less a person than the late Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru who had come to Bokaro to perform the opening ceremony along with Lady Mountbatten. By the Mother's grace several engineering hurdles vanished like mist before the rising sun; and by curious coincidence the commissioning date was 21<sup>st</sup> February, the Mother's birthday in 1953.

Even with such engineering achievements to his credit, P.K.B. was never in the habits of getting into the limelight. All work was the Mother's, to be done scrupulously, only for the Divine, without fear or favour. He was so self-effacing that it is difficult to chronicle all his achievements.

Prior to joining the D.V.C., P.K.B. had worked in Tata Iron and Steel Company, Jamshedpur, under a tough boss by name S.N. Bose. The first interview was somewhat unique:

Mr. Bose : Are you married?

P.K.B.: Not exactly.

Mr. Bose burst out laughing. He was very strict and exploded if a single mistake was made. P.K.B. had a difficult time with him, but there was no personal animosity. When P.K.B. became the Chief Electrical Engineer, he appointed Mr. Bose - one -time boss - as his consultant. P.K.B. bore no grudge or ill will even against those who had hurt him. Only a true child of the Mother can have such a mental disposition.

As a public relations officer P.K.B.'s contribution was par excellence. I have personally seen his capability to silence a furious mob of workers. Fear was unknown to P.K.B. His patience was infinite. He regarded those who behaved badly as erring mortals, to be brought back to the right path. Even in his forties he had the wisdom of a sage.

Children and the young fascinated P.K.B. He could spend hours talking to and joking with them. Even his subordinates and colleagues were not spared. Discussions would cover all types of topics - vegetarianism v. non-vegetarianism, what happens to the soul after death, whether Hindi or Sanskrit should be the national language, current politics, etc. It is easy to see that questions and answers would go inverse in geometrical progression.

Once P.K.B. had asked me to visit Pondicherry. This happened in the fifties when I had called on him at his Calcutta residence. He was reading *Savitri*. He advised me to read this epic. I read a few pages but could not understand the meaning. I told him there was no point in reading something one did not understand. When I called on him at Lakshmi's House, Calcutta, in 1930, he asked me if I had read *Savitri*. I replied that even as a *mantra* it was difficult to concentrate and read something which one did not comprehend. He asked the attendant to pull out a volume of *Savitri* from an adjoining shelf. He opened the book at a particular page and read aloud. He opened the book at a particular page and read aloud. He reiterated that it is not necessary to understand *Savitri*, but read one must. The meaning would become clear subsequently. Later on, I came across the Mother's injunction on how to read *Savitri*. I then understood what P.K.B. meant.

In the early seventies, I faced a professional and financial crisis. I wrote to P.K.B. and sought the Mother's help. Within a week I got his reply that he had spoken to the Mother and that all would be well. He added that I should remain calm. The Mother saved me.

Back to 1955. A large gathering of admirers and well-wishers waited patiently at the Howrah Station to bid farewell to dear P.K.B. Even here P.K.B. exchanged jokes and

anecdotes. One of these related to his leaving the D.V.C. to join the Ashram. The then Chairman of the D.V.C., known for his autocratic disposition, had made a last minute bid to lure P.K.B. to stay back. P.K.B. did not budge. The Chairman knew that he and P.K.B. were poles apart.



### Radha's Prayer

Every thought of my mind each  
 emotion of my heart every movement  
 of my being every <sup>feeling</sup> ~~thought~~ every <sup>reaction</sup> ~~feeling~~  
 each cell of my body, each drop  
 of my blood, all all is yours, yours  
 absolutely, yours without reserve.

You can decide my life  
 or my death, my happiness or my  
 sorrow, my pleasure or my pain,  
 whatever you do with me, whatever  
 comes to me from you will lead  
 me to divine rapture.

Radha Prasad

# THE ASHRAM : PONDICHERRY

“ I need you as my instrument”- The Mother

## RESUMPTION OF FRIENDSHIP

Soon after Pradyot had become an inmate of the Ashram the Mother formed two committees: A.C.C and T.C.C – agricultural and technological. All the members concerned were called by the Mother and she herself inaugurating the meeting, introduced Pradyot to them and said that he had acquired a vast experience and his technical knowledge and constructive wisdom would be of great help in their collective work. She asked them to meet regularly and discuss their problems with him as their Chairman. The Mother was the President. As I was not directly involved, I cannot go into the intricate problems associated with the work. I noticed that Pradyot used to meet the Mother every day for some months. When the Committee's hundredth sitting was completed, the Mother came and congratulated the Chairman for the fine role he had played in conducting their affairs.

When, on 29<sup>th</sup> April, 1961 the 300<sup>th</sup> meeting of the T.C.C. was completed, the Mother wrote on a card, “My blessings on this memorable occasion and the assurance of my constant presence for efficiency and success”. Again on the completion of its 400<sup>th</sup> meeting she wrote : “To T.C.C. for its 400<sup>th</sup> meeting. Blessings and appreciation of its fine and useful work”. One can easily mark the importance she gave to this work. Alas, the T.C.C. ceased to function after the Mother's withdrawal. I learn that the A.C.C. is going to be revived.

At this time or soon after, Pradyot was made the supervisor of the Electricity Department and was appointed Dean of the Electrical Section of the Centre of Education. He was also selected as the counsellor of the Pondicherry Government regarding electrical matters. In 1980, on the completion of 25 years' services the Government awarded him a certificate which he used to show to others with much satisfaction. As the Dean and the teacher, he was very successful indeed. The students under him praised him highly as a teacher, particularly in the practical training. He often used to tell me with a certain pride: “you know that boy X was rejected by all other teachers as a cipher? See now what I have done with him. How useful he has become!”

In the Electricity Department among various works, he seems to have set up boilers in the Dining Room and a Generator in the Ashram. The latter, particularly, was of immense service, first to the Mother herself in the main building of the Ashram and then to other departments. For the Pondicherry Electricity had acquired the habit of going off without notice and the entire main building would plunge into darkness with the Mother shining with only her inner light in her room !

7.5.67.

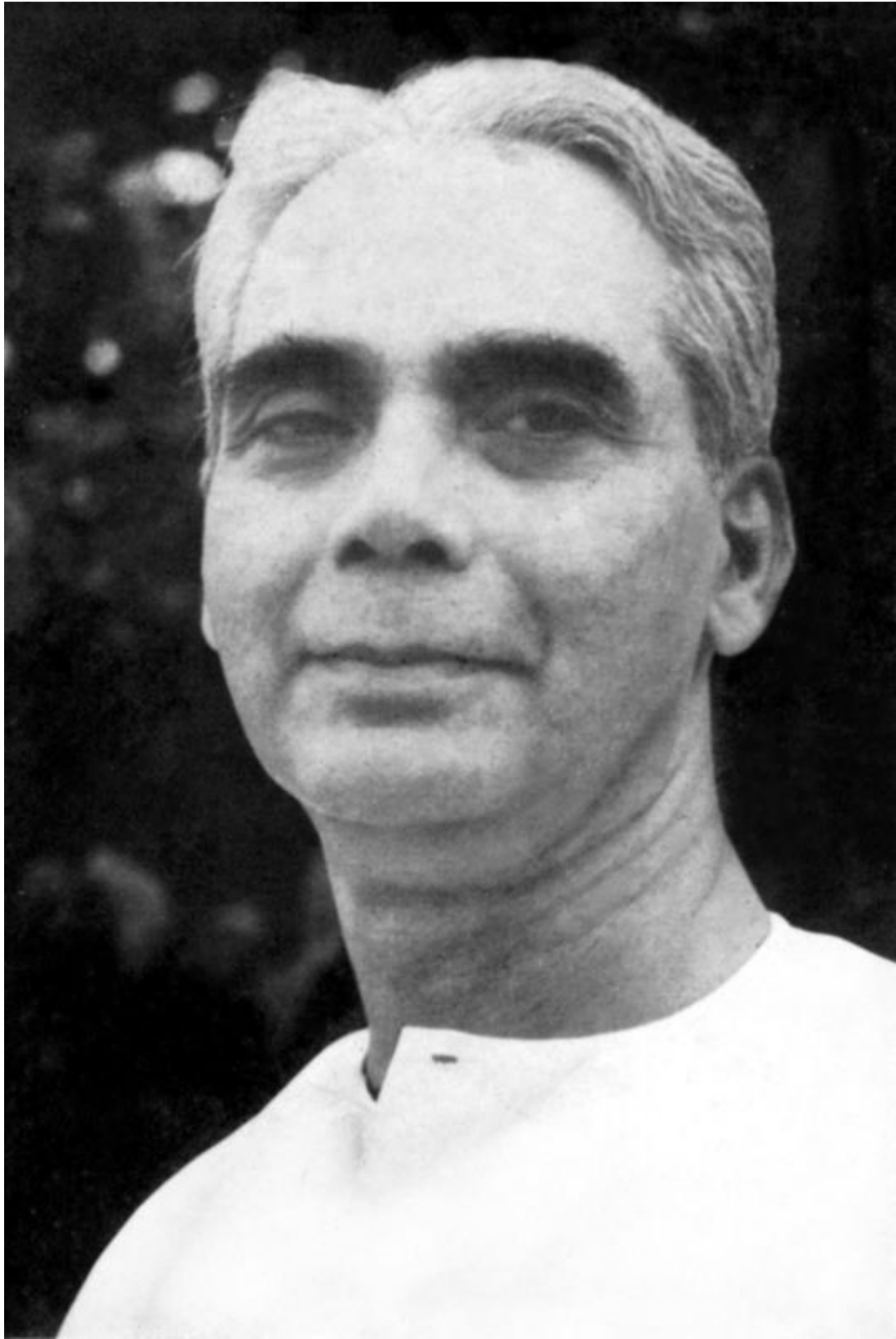


Pradyot, my dear child,  
I need you as my  
instrument, and  
you will remain so.

Be very quiet -  
endure with courage -  
I am with you,  
in love and in  
victory.

The Mother's message given to Pradyot





Pradyot's photograph (taken on his birthday, 1966)

On the occasion of the Mother's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, Pradyot staged an electric light festival in our Theatre Hall which earned him a big compliment from the Mother. As soon as she alighted from her car and entered the Theatre Hall, there was a sudden illumination on the trees and inside the hall. The Mother smiled at Pradyot and said, "This must be your trick!"

Long afterwards, when Sri Aurobindo's Action Committee was formed, the Mother made him its Chairman on the eve of Sri Aurobindo's Centenary. She called for Pradyot and said:

"Now the time has come when people should be told about Sri Aurobindo. India's freedom must be preserved. She must be ready to defend herself; she has to be reorganised. Sri Aurobindo has given in his various writings the solution to all her problems. All these should be translated into different regional languages and distributed free. Those who are eager to know about them, should be provided with them.

"We are facing a great danger. There is only one way to face it. Sri Aurobindo's way is given in his books. It is a very serious work and should be finished before Sri Aurobindo's Centenary celebration two years hence".

At the Mother's direction, a journal called *Sri Aurobindo's Action* was brought out and as its mouthpiece a monthly paper *Basudhara* was published in Bengali. A group of sadhaks under Pradyot's supervision was sent to different places of India to make the people aware of Sri Aurobindo's message. A small book called *On India*, dealing with the country's problems and their solution, was brought out.

( A foreign invasion was apprehended by the Mother at this time. Hence the precaution).

In addition to the Ashram work which was not really much, considered in proportion to his ability and efficiency, he became with the Mother's approval Consultant Engineer to the Bengal and Bihar Governments. He had to pay them regular visits, for which a handsome allowance was paid to him. He used to offer all that sum personally to the Mother on the day of his arrival. The Mother had given instructions that he could see her with the money at any hour of the day. Even at other times before he departed on his visits he used to consult her on the various relevant problems of the country- political, social and technical . His questions were short, precise and direct and similar were the answer of the Mother.

I have two entries in my diary apropos of what the Mother said to Pradyot. Since they are interesting and revealing, I am recording them here. In 1965 or 1966 there was a severe drought in Bihar, Pradyot used to visit Bihar at that time. He had a close contact with the Engineers of that place. Very probably at their request Pradyot referred to the drought in his talk with the Mother. He said that though there had been rain due to the Mother's intervention and green patches were visible, still some places were without any vegetation,

and there was general scarcity of drinking water. The Mother asked, "Are there still difficulties ? The rain was not sufficient?"

Pradyot replied, "Perhaps not sufficient in those places. But are these difficulties necessary?"

Mother: No ! There are two reasons for them. One is the people's inertia. They need blows to wake them up. The other is more serious; it is a sort of liking, a preference for other is more serious; it is a sort of liking, a preference for dramas which invite the blows.

The *sadhana* is now going on in the cells. All difficulties will disappear but it will take time. I do not have much time to devote to this work, otherwise it could have been done quicker.

The other talk was about the special descent or manifestation that took place on the 4<sup>th</sup> May, 1967, symbolically represented as 4-5-67. Pradyot was to leave for Calcutta and he wanted to know what was the significance of these figures so that he could, if he were asked, tell people about it. When Pradyot went to see the Mother, she said, " You came to me this morning i.e. in a dream and asked me the meaning of 4-5-67. You can tell them :

4. Manifestation

5. Power

6. New Creation

7. Realisation

This will keep them quiet. I am not sure that it did not happen on 24<sup>th</sup> April. The meditation on that day was unique in my life. The very cells of the body were totally conscious. After the meditation, I should have kept sitting for a few minutes, but I got up instead to reach the table and I nearly fell. Something was happening from the New Year day, very very concrete. 24<sup>th</sup> April might be a preparation for 4<sup>th</sup> May.

Once a leader of a political group had gone on a sham hunger-strike on the pavement opposite the Ashram gate. It continued for several days, and the Mother seems to have instructed people that they need not pay any attention to him. One fine morning, he was conspicuous by his absence. What had happened was that the day before this Pradyot had gone to see the Mother and asked her, "Why don't you stop this farce?" She had replied , "The Divine alone can do it." Pradyot had retorted , "But are you not the Divine? Why do you confuse me ?" She had smiled and said, "But I am telling you what people say." The next day the Divine acted.

So this was Pradyot's way with the Mother, easy and straightforward. About his reports to her on people's problems, she once said, "When you report, you become transparent; I see people speaking through you. You are one of the few who say things without colouring them".

At times she used to cut jokes with him. When Pradyot was dilating at length on the story of a girl, the Mother asked him, "Why are you so kind to her?" Pradyot replied, "What am I to do, Mother? People say that she is my daughter". The Mother mischievously added, "Are you sure she is not?" and at once covered her mouth with her hand. Once Pradyot had gone to see the Mother. When talk was proceeding she said, Wait awhile. I am just coming." Pradyot waited and waited until she returned after about two hours. Finding him there she exclaimed, "Oh, you are still waiting ! You are an angel of patience". The fact is that the Mother went to the bathroom and forgot everything, which was almost always the case. The bathroom was her secret seat of inspiration for all problems.

Now he was made a special instrument for collecting funds for the Ashram. We were passing through difficult times after Sri Aurobindo had left his body. In 1958, the Mother called Pradyot and said, "I have no money. I shall have to go to the Himalayas." "How much do you need, Mother ? How long will the crisis last ?" he asked. The answer: "I need ten lakhs. Will you be able to get five lakhs at least?" "I shall try, Mother," "But how ? If people become paupers as a result ?" She queried. "What of that? What if they bust ? Can anyone become a pauper on the score of offering money to the Divine ?" he queried. The Mother smiled, "No!" Pradyot left for Calcutta, assembled all friends and devotees and placed before them the predicament. There was a generous response. Somebody even sold his car. Thus the crisis was averted. When he returned, the Mother said, "I was thinking how you could go on such a bold venture. I looked into your past and I knew."

During a second crisis, the Mother had to sell her saris, ornaments, etc. Dyuman appeared one day before Pradyot with a box of these ornaments for disposal. He went to Calcutta and disposed of them to his familiar associates at whatever reasonable or unreasonable price struck him as fitting. On another occasion, Sri Aurobindo himself said to the Mother, "Ask Pradyot."

Pradyot helped Dr. Sanyal to meet part of his expenses for treatment in America for Parkinson's Disease.

At another time an Australian who had worked for many years in an Ashram garden wanted to return home, but was short of adequate funds. He had a costly shawl in exchange for which he wished to get a big sum. The Mother called Pradyot and said, "Look at this shawl. How pretty it is !" She was going to spread out its beauty. He understood the Mother's motive and said, "Don't unfold it, Mother. Tell me how much you want." "Ten thousand

rupees, he says". "Very well, Mother." He got the money, The Mother obviously wanted to recompense the man for his long service to her; the shawl was an excuse.

Whenever Pradyot brought these offerings, he noted the names, amounts and addresses of all the people, however small the sums contributed, and sent the Mother's blessings to every donor. Once, back from Calcutta with the offerings, he said to Gargi, his adopted daughter, "Now I can sit in my easy chair and enjoy rest." Hearing of this the Mother remarked, "You can't just sit on an easy chair and change the world".

Here the question likely to be asked is : "From where did Pradyot get his power ? How could he exercise such power ?"

There are many answers. But the main one, I believe, can be found in Sri Aurobindo's book, *The Mother*. Sri Aurobindo says about money, " When you ask for the Mother, you must feel that it is she who is demanding through you a very little of what belongs to her and the man from whom you ask will be judged by his response. If you are free from the money-taint but without any ascetic withdrawal, you will have a greater power to command the money for the divine work." I believe Pradyot fulfilled this condition admirably.

The second answer is to be discovered in the history of his past which the Mother hinted at.

The third answer is, of course, the Mother's occult Force acting through and behind him. She once gave him what looked like an old Tibetan coin. It was on her table with a coiled wire-like snake upon it. She removed this figure, as the snake, a symbol of the sex-power, was guarding the money-power. She gave also a talisman. Both these represented the money-power, she said, "Keep them with you. These will bring all the money you need".

In this context Pradyot told the Mother. " Mother, where lies any credit for me in all this? It is your Force which is doing everything. Anybody can be your instrument". The Mother smiled and replied , "It is so, but you can't play the piano on a log of wood".

Pradyot's second commission was of a different kind and more serious. It was during the Indo-Chinese war. The Government had opened a War-fund. The Mother sent a few of her ornaments to Nehru through Pradyot, saying that the box must reach him on 1<sup>st</sup> November. Pradyot delivered it accordingly, mentioning the date selected. Nehru opened the box and said "Give it to Indira." She was sitting there. Indira looked at the ornaments and told her father, "They mean that the Mother's help is with us." Then she asked Pradyot , "Why was the 1<sup>st</sup> November chosen?" Pradyot replied, "I don't know that". On his return the Mother asked him what Indira specially had said, for "Indira has an individuality of her own," the Mother added. As regards the 1<sup>st</sup> November, she explained to him that it was the date of the merger of the French colonies with India.

The third commission was more delicate. Once Pradyot told me that the Mother had been asking him about the political condition of the country and if he knew anyone who could be a leader. She had added, " I want a man with your faith and a Kshatriya's body. Once Pradyot told her, when he was in Calcutta, that at times he felt a tremendous force as if he could pull down the whole universe. "Am I turning mad, Mother?" he asked. She smiled and added, "It's just because you have faith." Pradyot always kept himself informed of the political situation of the country as well as movements in other fields. He had quite a bit of insight regarding the trends of events and persons. He was always up-to-date in his general and technical knowledge, which gave him ascendancy over other people. I have seen him reading journals on electricity till his last days. After a lapse of months, a person of the Mother's description was supposed to have found. A contact was made with him ; he came to visit the Ashram incognito and interviewed the Mother. But it transpired that he had no intention of entering politics. He had done a very strenuous and responsible job and he desired a quiet and peaceful life. That was the end of Pradyot's political mission. Soon after, Indira Gandhi became the Prime Minister and we know what followed ; the Mother considered her an excellent instrument. When, during her visit to the Ashram Pradyot was introduced to her, she said, "Yes I know him."

A sincere and intelligent instrument like Pradyot is of great help to the Mother's work. Pradyot's contact with a large circle of friends outside made him a medium between them and the Mother because of his free access to her. They would communicate through him all their troubles and difficulties to the Mother and get her reply and blessings. Once a close relative of a friend was suffering from cancer and Pradyot was approached to seek for the Mother's help. She replied, " Cancer is no longer an incurable disease, but even after the cure , a kind of *malaise* persists in some cases for quite a long time. One must be ready for it. For the cure what is needed is :

1. In the case of a Sadhak, he must remain calm and quiet and call down the light on the diseased part.
2. In the case of bhakta, he should be like a child and pray for relief.
3. If one is an intellectual, one should busy oneself with some work so that the mind may not be preoccupied with the disease.
4. For worldly people, they should also keep themselves busy.

Pradyot added, " I should say that since the disease is no incurable they should serve the Mother and have trust in you." " That means surrender. That of course is the best," the Mother replied.

On one of his birthdays, in 1966, the Mother said to Champaklal, "Tomorrow is pradyot's birthday. Prepare a card for him with that picture of me which signifies 'Realisation'. On the left side of the picture, near about my chest, fix the head of a lion". Pradyot remembered gratefully till his last day that the Mother had kept him close to her heart. The next day the Mother, wishing Pradyot "Bonne Fete", gave him the card. From that day, his

house was converted into a quiet den of lions pictured in various poses: they were hanging in the curtains, sitting on the tables, watching from above the staircase and protecting Pradyot in his bedroom. On his birthday in 1967 the Mother presented him a card with the picture of a lion surrounded by smaller animals with a fire in the centre, "It is a symbolic image of your action".

Once Pradyot made the following prayers to the Mother:

- i. That you may get all the money you need
- ii. That I may be a good and faithful instrument, not a weak or broken one.
- iii. That the child Gargi be happy and healthy and a faithful instrument.
- iv. That all those who are around me turn towards you.
- v. That we may have your constant presence.

The Mother wrote back, "Granted". Indeed the prayers were granted, for plenty of people from all classes had the Mother's divine touch through Pradyot and changed their lives. Such was the power the Mother had given him.

On 8<sup>th</sup> February 1971, I went to see him . He gave me a letter of the Mother to read. I was very happy to note that the Mother had appointed him one of the Trustees of the Ashram. In this capacity he rendered invaluable service with his rich knowledge and experience and he developed a natural insight which helped him in taking a correct decision in many matters. He used to say that he was needed most when a decision was in question. At a time when the Ashram had opened itself to a subtle attack from outside forces, his shrewdness and firmness stood it in good stead and enabled it to tide over the difficulty.

At times people complained that he was harsh and even rude. But this aspect of his was more of a show. Of course he could roar too. Then he would ascribe it to his Brahmanic blood which could not bear any falsehood. All this does not mean that he made no mistakes. To my mind, he committed quite a few serious blunders, but always from a sense, however misapplied, of justice. At times the ways of the outside world to which he had long been accustomed dominated his conduct, but I must avow that in the latter part of his life he had become much chastened and tolerant. He had displeased people and people displeased and even disappointed him, but he did not bear any ill-feeling towards them and rarely criticised anybody. In many ways he could be called a true gentleman, an aristocrat.



*A symbolic image  
of your actions.*

Pradyot's Birthday Card, 1967





31. 8. 67

Bonne Fête !

to Pradyot

with love

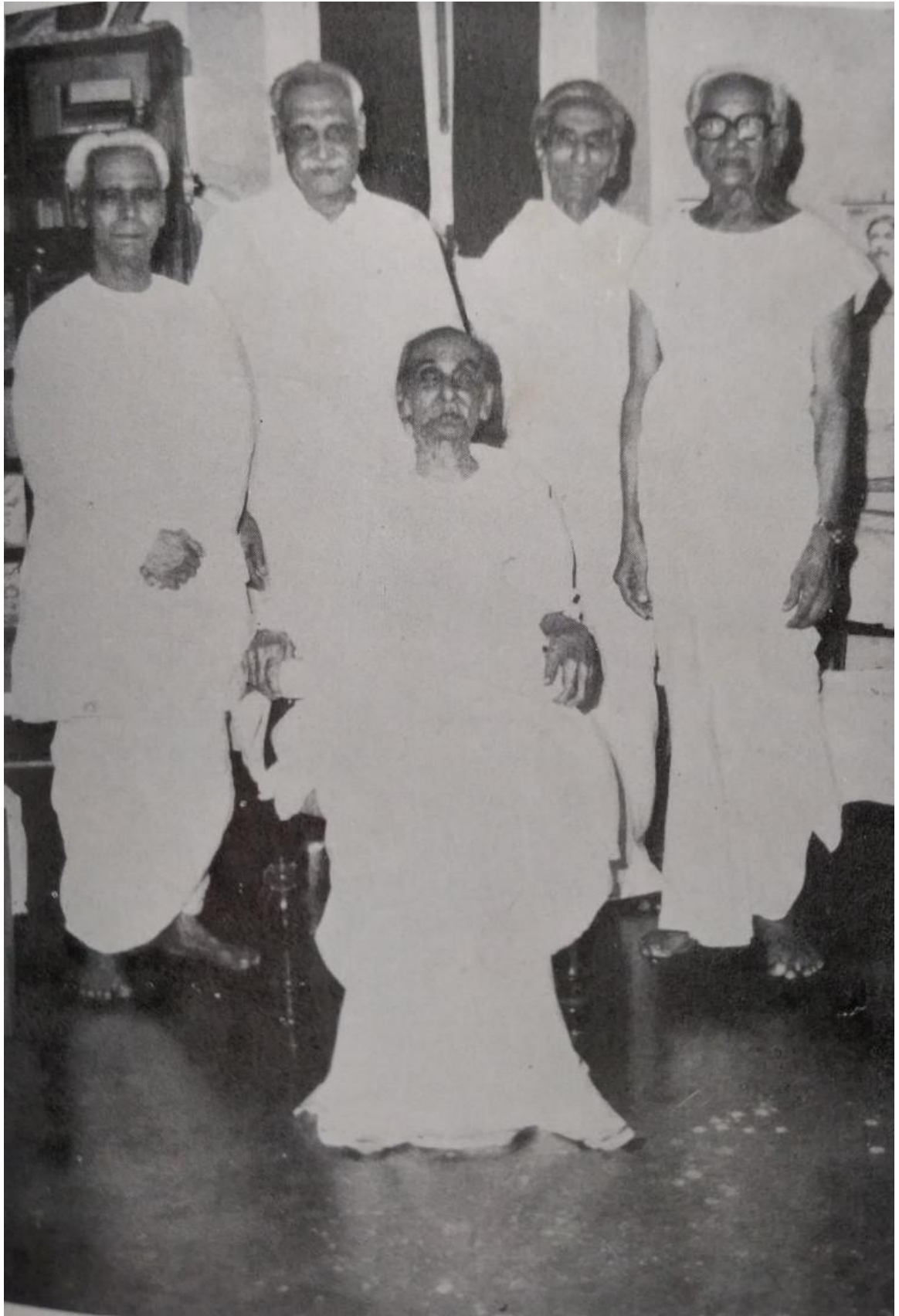
and blessings

for the strength


to fulfil his

mission

Pradyot's Birthday Card, 1967



Five Trustees of Sri Aurobindo Ashram - Nolinikanta Gupta, Dyumanbhai, P.Counouma, Harikanth Patel and Pradyot

An unshakable  
faith in the Divine's Grace  
and no disharmony can  
resist let rejoice  
with my love and blessings  


A message given by the Mother to Pradyot

## RANIDI

As I have already said, Ranidi was Pradyot's wife, and a very devoted one too. Calm and quiet, generous by nature, she was an educated lady. She had held the post of the Inspectress of Schools at Dacca and was used to a semi-western way of life. She had a Muslim boy as her Khansama and addressed him as 'Boy'. He was very gentle by nature and as cook he was excellent. Ranidi brought him along with her when she retired from service. The 'Boy' had to give up his job when Pradyot decided to settle in the Ashram. He sent a special invitation to Pradyot on the occasion of his marriage and wanted him to grace the function with his presence. Pradyot could not of course oblige him, but sent a handsome gift.

Ranidi had two lovely dogs whom Pradyot also cherished. One died of some disease, the other from an accident, being run over by a car. That was the painful end of their joint liking for dogs.

At first she was not quite well-disposed towards the Ashram, because she thought we were a band of *sadhus* who had given up all contact with the world. If Pradyot took up such a life, the country would lose a very fine and capable worker when it was in dire need of such people. In one of her visits afterwards she spoke highly of Pradyot's technical acumen and proudly of his being called to an eminent post at the Centre. On her account Pradyot could not make up his mind to come away to the Ashram and he said that as long as his wife was not willing he could not do so. Things changed, however, after few visits by her to the Ashram. At one *darshan*, she seems to have felt that Sri Aurobindo was Christ come back. When both she and Pradyot had settled here, one day the Mother told Ranidi, "I want you to be happy here," She was not keeping good health. She had a cataract in one eye a tumour in the uterus. Pradyot was rather concerned. One thing that I had noticed in him was that the suffering of anyone near to him caused him much anxiety. The tumour trouble was referred to the Mother. She frowned upon the idea of an operation and it was decided that the tumour had to go without it. I myself witnessed its gradual disappearance. The cataract on the other hand was less amenable and, according to medical opinion, it turned towards glaucoma. The Mother advised Ranidi to remain quiet. One evening she had a fall. So someone had to look after her, Pradyot being constantly away in Calcutta. Fortunately, Gargidi had by then become a member of the household.

One evening I was called to see Ranidi. She was moaning in pain in the back. I took it to be a muscular ache and, prescribing a sedative, came away. After 11 p.m. I was called up from sleep and told that she had passed away. It was a shock indeed and Pradyot in Calcutta! It turned out to have been a heart attack which ended in an agonising departure.

This was on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1962. And on the same date of the same month 22 years later Pradyot himself departed after a painful heart attack.

In the morning the Mother was informed of Ranidi's death . A telegram was sent to Pradyot , but since the body could not be kept for him, the decision was taken for cremation in the afternoon. Pradyot arrived. I accompanied him to his house and gave him the details of the sad event. As soon as he reached home he threw himself prone on Ranidi's bed for a while and then came out, calm and composed. Then he went straight to the Ashram to see the Mother. He almost broke down before her, but she consoled him with her sweet love. He said to her, "Mother, I leave her with you," to which she replied, Not with me, she is in me, you are in me, the whole universe is in me."

In a later period, Pradyot looked upon this assurance as almost similar to the vision of *Vishwarupa* granted to Arjuna, and counted himself a most fortunate person. With utter gratitude, he would exclaim , " Mother has shown me her Vishwarupa. How blessed am I. The Divine has revealed his *Swarupa* to me." This faith and conviction were so firmly engraved in his heart that other's lack of faith used to hurt him keenly. He could not understand how people seeing the Mother so often could still live in doubt about her divinity. His repeated cry was : "The Mother is the Divine. Have this faith established in your heart and love her, serve her, work for her," One day a *sadhak* came to discuss with him the drawbacks and defects of the Ashram. Pradyot asked him, " Have you seen the Divine?" He answered, Sri Ramakrishna alone can answer such a question." Pradyot had no further talk with him. Later he remarked, "Seeing the Mother so many times, how could he say that?"

# THE “HOME OF GRACE”

Sri Aurobindo Institute of Culture

Hitherto, whatever Pradyot visited Calcutta he stayed in premier hotels. Now the Mother asked him to take up residence in the “Home of Grace” along with Arun Tagore. The “Home of Grace” is a very big edifice in Regent Park, belonging to one Lakshmi Devi Loyalka and called Lakshmi’s House. She had offered the House to the Mother in memory of her dead husband. The Mother wrote, “ We shall call it Lakshmi’s House and it will be the Home of Grace”. Arun Tagore, attorney and friend of the family, was invited by the lady to come and settle there and look after the house. In 1963, he accepted the proposal with the Mother’s permission. Arun was a great friend of Pradyot’s.

Arun started a library and then in 1972 opened a Kindergarten school in order to spread the Mother’s idea of education. The Mother named it ‘Arun Nursery School’. There had previously been a ‘Shakti Centre’ for women opened by Lakshmi Devi. In 1975, Arun suddenly passed away. Just before his departure he had opened the Sri Aurobindo Institute of Culture and made Pradyot its Chairman. What began as a small venture, developed gradually into a big project under Pradyot’s initiative and drive. Lakshmi House was truly Lakshmi’s Palace. A huge area and a large mansion to be maintained and kept in order needed a big monthly expenditure. Pradyot had to meet it.

On the other hand, his creative genius saw for itself a vast scope which was not available in the Ashram. Difficulties and obstacles never daunted his spirit when he had undertaken some work. He relied on the Mother’s help and on his confidence in himself. In 1977 Sri Aurobindo’s relics were taken and placed in a beautiful setting in the “Home of Grace” by the Chief Justice of Calcutta. Sri Shankar Prasad Mitra. Beside the Nursery School, cultural training in music, singing, dancing medical treatment, a printing press, lectures on the Mother and Sri Aurobindo were set going one after another. Recently, *saris*, *gamchhas* and napkins have been supplied to the Ashram from this establishment’s own weaving machines. Pradyot’s eye was constantly fixed on how to be of service to the Ashram. Most opportunely, he saw in Joya Mitter a lady of immense capabilities whom he adored like own daughter, and put her in charge of the administration. Pradyot also built up a group of friends who were ready to do whatever he requested of them.

Those who have visited the Institute have showered praise on Pradyot for his creative ability in many directions and for the quiet atmosphere, the meticulous care in keeping the place spotlessly clean so that one could at once feel the presence of the Mother as in a temple. Of late Sanjukta Panigrahi, the premier Odissi dancer, started to train students in her art at Lakshmi’s House. Uday Shankar, the famous dancer of Bengal, in his last days, had lost grace with the public and it seemed he was jobless. He had heard of Lakshmi’s House and came there to seek for a place where he could hold his classes. Pradyot listened to his

problems and promptly said, "You are welcome". Uday Sankar, overwhelmed, exclaimed, "I now believe that there is God!" This story was narrated to me by Pradyot himself. A grave problem facing him was that the area in which the Institute was located was politically disturbed. Gradually it has been cleansed of bad influences and transformed into a respectable place, I have been told.

Since Pradyot had to be present on his birthday at Pondicherry, it was observed in Lakshmi's House on the previous day. The children of the physical cultural section (Devasangha) and of the Arun Nursery School used to observe it with prayers, songs, dances, recitations and parade with their dear Dadu as their central figure. Oh, it was a day of rejoicings. In the evening the function ended with devotional songs or dance programmes by reputed artistes or Pradyot's readings from *Savitri*. Every year it repeated itself and brought joy, beauty and a fresh lease of life to its founder and to those who were part and parcel of the organisation.

Lakshmi's House is a unique testimony to Pradyot's creative genius as regards its organisation and operation. There were two sides to it; one, a surprising efflorescence of his individuality in an hitherto unknown splendour; the second, giving the Lakshmi's House a touch of novelty among other centres by his glowing faith in the Mother's Grace aided by his untiring zeal.

Let us throw some light on the second aspect. The Mother proclaimed that Lakshmi's House would be the Home of Grace. There came a time when the situation turned very critical so much so that Lakshmi's House had to be either abandoned or kept up at the cost of a huge sum of money. Then was heard Pradyot's leonine voice: "I shall keep my Mother's Home of Grace, if need be, with the last drop of my blood. Don't you know that the Mother Bhagavati has called this house alone the Home of Grace? How could you think that I would give it up so long as life remains in me?" Such were the words he uttered to his Calcutta friends.

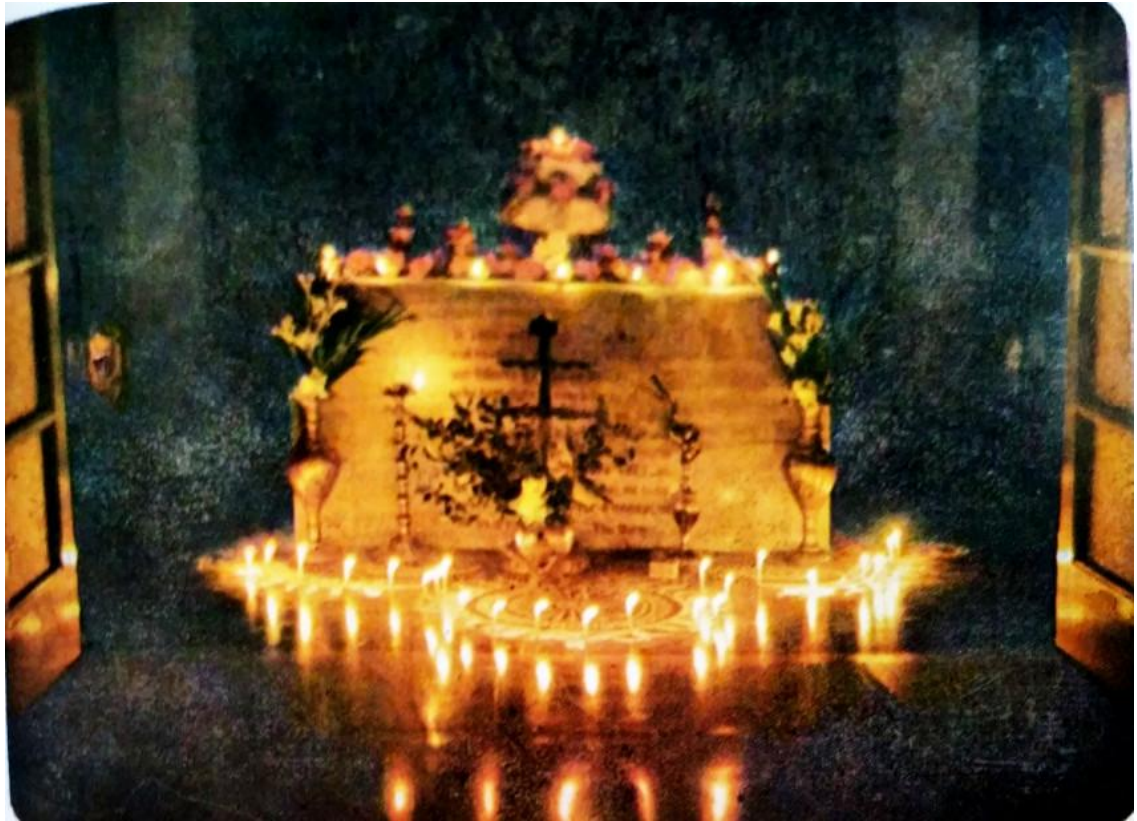
In Pradyot's eyes of vision, Lakshmi's House extending beyond its material bounds of wood, bricks and stone, became the abode of the Divine Mother. It is for this reason that he was able to surmount innumerable difficulties and with a steady, calm spirit take up the heavy responsibility on his shoulder. A boy who called him Dadu felt at this time a lion-like power in him and there emitted from his thick eye-brows a tremendous courage. The Mother once gave Pradyot a card which bore on one side a line from *Savitri*, "Her single will opposed the cosmic rule," and on other, written in her own hand, "Pradyot is it this you wanted?" In this context that young boy recalled a message of the Mother, "Truth is a victory won after hard labour" To win it, we must be fearless warriors who fear nothing, let come foes or death, let people be for him or against him, let the body be or be not. An uninterrupted fight must go on till it ends in victory." Pradyot fulfilled that responsibility squarely until his last moment. His close circle of friends has perceived what tremendous pressure was brought to bear upon his frail body while discharging the burden of Lakshmi's House, but Pradyot, armoured with the Mother's might, went ahead undaunted, fighting all

the way and caring the least about his health. On the one hand, he spent his last drop of energy in the service of the Mother's Home of Grace; on the other, he flung the doors of that temple wide open to all and sundry. Always a reticent person, he articulated these few words to the audience on the occasion of the Mother's Centenary celebration. "This House is the Mother's, therefore it is yours. She has named this house the Home of Grace. Come all of you, accept her grace. The doors of this House will always be kept open for you." But those who responded to this generous call were mostly the youth whom Pradyot could attract by his natural charming personality. His appeal to them was as simple: "Have a firm faith in the Mother, love her deeply, dedicate your life in her service." Pradyot was to them their dear Dadu, an intimate friend and sincere well-wisher. He had sat and eaten with them, walked about with and given himself to them without reserve, cut jokes with them and made them his own. Those who wanted to prepare themselves for the Ashram life have received his unstinted help. One extremist young man confessed to have turned a new page in his violent life under Pradyot's sweet influence. As the Chairman of the Institute of Culture, he made the members feel that everything there belonged to the Mother and the Ashram. Hence when the section could send napkins and *gamchhas* to the Mother's Prosperity Department, his deep happiness expressed itself, but in a few simple words such as: "You know, Nirod, 500 *gamchhas* have been offered by the Institute of Culture." When the people around began gradually to join the Institute, they began to call it "The Ashram". Pradyot was happy to learn of it and said, "They have caught the truth". This centre alone in Calcutta goes by this name. And in this Centre, Pradyot had introduced the rules and disciplines of the Ashram, setting himself as an example. Around the altar of Sri Aurobindo's Samadhi perfect silence and meticulous cleanliness were maintained. No tiny stain about could escape his keen eye and he would clean it up himself.

The future alone will be the witness of his work starting with small footsteps, striding forward and becoming an extraordinarily active Institute. That was his dream.

At least that it would be the Mother's Home of Grace, was his abiding faith. And it has become a realised fact. Today, Pradyot's soul will be happy to see that his own life-work Lakshmi's House, has transformed itself into the Mother's Home of Grace in every part of it. The Light that radiates from it is a part of the Mother's eternal Light.





Picture of the Samadhi at Lakshmi's House



Pradyot sitting in the Library at Lakshmi's House



31 - 8 - 63

"Bonne Fête!"

to Pradyot  
with my love  
and blessings for  
a happy and everlasting  
collaboration

Pradyot's Birthday Card (1963)

## **D.C.P.L.**

No doubt, the well-being and success of an organisation depends largely on the corporate policies it chooses. The quality of leadership is a prime determinant of corporate behavioural patterns and plays a major role in shaping the organisation's fortunes. However, to what extent an organisation's performance is accepted by society, is reflected in the kind of well-wishers it gathers around itself, and the quality of interaction that comes about automatically, without intent or effort.

It is a matter of great satisfaction and pride that Development Consultants Private Limited (DCPL) found in the late Sri P.K. Bhattacharya not only its most ardent well-wisher, but also its Friends, Philosopher and Guide of a stature that will remain unparalleled.

D.C.P.L. got acquainted with Mr. Bhattacharya when he was Chief Electrical Engineer of the D.V.C. D.C.P.L. was The Kuljian Corporation then, and was entrusted with the consultancy assignment for Bokaro Power Station. Though it was a mere formal relationship, Mr. S.C. Dutt and other senior officers of D.C.P.L. realised even in those early days that here was an engineer not only wholly sound in knowledge, but committed in heart to the task under his charge. D.C.P.L. being equally committed to the Bokaro job, a relation of mutual trust and confidence was established instantaneously between Mr. Bhattacharya and D.C.P.L.

Around 1954 -55 P.K.B. retired prematurely from the D.V.C. Yet by then he had often unknowingly demonstrated his deep love for the Mother of Pondicherry Ashram and his uninhibited confidence in the Powers of her Grace. For instance, Mr. Dutta remembers how often P.K.B. sought suggestions from the Mother before taking any major decision and how faithfully he obeyed her every directive. So much so that the day for inaugurating the power plant at Bokaro was decided upon after consultation with the Mother.

Upon retirement from the D.V.C., P.K.B. went to live at the Ashram so he could serve the Mother and be at her beck and called without having to be interrupted by worldly distraction. It was a crucial period in his life, following which, he emerged a person with heart and soul dedicated to the service of the Mother.

This dedication was reflected amply in the nature of the influence that P.K.B.'s personality and thinking cast on the policies and activities of D.C.P.L. After his D.V.C. days P.K.B. was a Member on its consulting committee and also an adviser to Bihar State Electricity Board. Since D.C.P.L. was then working closely with both these agencies, P.K.B. visited D.C.P.L.'s Calcutta offices regularly and offered his advice and guidance for the smooth execution of its crucial responsibilities.

His interest and deep concern for D.C.P.L. was also evident when the organisation undertook consulting activities for the Bandel Thermal Power Station in West Bengal. He often visited the site during the plant's construction stages, evinced keen interest in the

multifarious project implementation activities and offered valuable advice that came as much from experience as from his love and good wishes for D.C.P.L.

Once a major problem was encountered during construction of the intake structure. Upon excavation at site an uncontrollable torrent of underground water began to gush out. Seasoned engineers tried in vain for days to stop this continuous flow; it was a problem that apparently defeated technical solution. P.K.B. was casually informed of this situation. He forthright went to Pondicherry and informed the Mother of this situation. He returned to Bandel, albeit with her blessings and in a boat, sailed into the Ganga. There he performed Puja, invoked the blessings of this river Goddess and returned to the site where, within hours, the flow of water began to cease until it came to a total stop.

It was in 1956 that P.K.B. first took Mr. Dutt to the Ashram, and it was with P.K.B.'s assistance that Mr. Dutt had his first *Darshan* of the Mother. It was during this period that P.K.B. began to care for the well-being of D.C.P.L. as only a parent can.

Without either P.K.B. or D.C.P.L. aware of it, they gradually became so intimate with each other that within a few years their two identities became inseparable. He viewed D.C.P.L.'s problems as his own and regularly prayed to the Mother to give D.C.P.L. the strength and confidence to surmount every problem and impediment that came in its way of growth.

Over the years and in view of his close association with D.C.P.L., P.K.B. influenced the minds and hearts of such eminent engineers as Messrs B.N. Ojha, Chairman of B.S.E.B. and B.N. Banerjee of W.B.S.E.B. He helped their institutions to overcome several crucial technical problems; in every case, he attributed the solutions to the Mother's Grace, opining that people irrespective of occupation or profession, should seek her blessings to lead a fuller and more meaningful life.

However, it was not for technical problems alone that P.K.B. offered his unstinted advice and guidance. Anyone could seek his help to resolve personal problems. In each case, one was assured of receiving his deepest sympathies, whole-hearted attention and practical suggestions for overcoming the hurdles. He believed that faith in fellow humans was the one and only means of surmounting the multifaceted problems that men encounter in their daily lives. Trust in fellow humans, and a commitment to the basic truths of life, combined with total surrender to the powers of the Mother was the surest of living a full satisfying life, he felt.

Events of the subsequent years served only to reflect how much closer D.C.P.L. and P.K.B. came to each other. He participated in every major corporate decision taken by this organisation, offered his intelligent yet humble suggestions at every decision – making crossroad and invoked the Mother's blessings whenever the time came for the organisation to take a forward step. He showered his good wishes on this organisation through its Kuljian days, the D.C.P.L. period and the years when D.C. went international to execute several projects abroad.

During the last few years when Mr. Dutt had perforce to live in America, P.K.B. assumed the organisation's responsibilities as his very own and frequently travelled to Calcutta from Pondicherry so he could personally oversee D.C.P.L.'s day-to-day workings in Mr. Dutt's absence. Mr. Dutt and other senior officers constantly forbade him to travel so frequently, particularly because of his failing health. But here was a man who paid the least attention to his own self; here was one whose concern transcended earthly trivialities and entered into the sublime world of love and affection.

It is now quite some time that P.K.B. has been lost to the world. But his spirit lingers in every thought, every action that is performed by D.P.C.L. at home or abroad, during times smooth or trying. His very presence in our hearts is evident in the humane attitudes that become part of our corporate ethics; his all-pervading influence is so much evident in our activities that we feel and will continue to feel his presence in our hearts for ever.

(This chapter is written by Sri Sadhan Dutt)

## CLEANLINESS AND SENSE OF BEAUTY

The old saying “ Cleanliness is next to godliness”, was Pradyot’s motto in life. In his boyhood he was always simple, neat and clean. As I have mentioned earlier, he was seen in his school and college days clothed in plain *dhoti* and *punjabi*, but always neat and clean. His small room was kept tidy. There was no tinge of pomp and show either in dress or in manners. This trait got its increased perfection by his contact with the West. Later on when he lived an affluent life, and dressed himself well, befitting his rank, cleanliness was always given a high place at home and in his office and there was added to it a sense of beauty. He regarded his central working place as temple of the Divine Mother and tried his best to keep it so in its extreme appearance. It is told the Bokaro Thermal Power Station which was under his charge was maintained flawlessly tidy and an engineer was given this aspect of the work. One person was especially employed to wipe off any stain caused by the spitting of pan-chewing. We have seen him using his handkerchief to collect his expectoration , a *la* European custom.

In Lakshmi’s House it seems he trained the children in the art of cleanliness and instructed the women-teachers to teach them how to use the bathroom.

In the eighties the West Bengal Government requested him to be the Chairman of the Santaldi Enquiry Commission. He used to accept such works as a part of the Mother’s service. He stated in the Commission’s report that many electrical plants are not kept clean in our country – that’s a very big problem. If the machines are allowed to be coated with dust, they will naturally be clogged and put out of order. Pradyot told me that when he was asked to inspect some machines, he was surprised to see them thickly coated as if with centuries of dust; no wonder that it ended in power-breakdowns. Apart from it, if factories and industrial centres are kept clean and tidy, the workers themselves put in more work. He always held the view that most of the ills of our country originate from the laziness and lack of aesthetic sense of those who are in responsible positions.

Padyot was a worshipper of beauty. In tune with his stress on material cleanliness was his inner cleanliness. Devious and crooked ways were against the grain of his nature. His private and public dealings were clean and straightforward. One who takes up one’s work as service of the Mother cannot be otherwise.

## PHYSICAL HEALTH

SINCE his boyhood, Pradyot had enjoyed good health. Though he was not physically robust, he did not suffer from intercurrent diseases, as I did, for instance. I came to know that his father had trained him in simple austerities regarding the outer and inner conduct of his life. He was disciplined in all respects. Among all his brothers and sisters he was the son of promise and every care was taken to mould him into a boy of firm character and bright intelligence. He was even precocious, it seems. He used to correct the mistakes of his brothers and give them counsels for which he was nick-named 'Munsif'. His father was a moral and religious man. When Pradyot could not appear in the Matric Exam along with us owing to his being under-age his father would not sign, as others did, any affidavit to declare his eligibility. In Glasgow he had no physical trouble as far as I know. Only at Jamshedpur the first symptoms of a stomach ulcer were heard of and he attributed its origin to a phase of rigorous fasting during the Non-Co-operation movement. He informed Sri Aurobindo of it and for twelve years he was free from further symptoms, but he was always careful about his diet. When he had settled here. I noticed that he used to have what he termed colitis which would subside with drugs. In 1960, there was a recurrence of the ulcer symptoms and the Mother was informed. In 1962, there was a moderate attack and I spent two or three nights in his house. Dr.Sanyal was treating him. In this year his wife passed away and Gargi became a member of the household and looked after her "Daddy" with the same care as was bestowed by Ranidi.

In 1967 the Mother wrote to Pradyot apropos of his illness, "Pradyot, my dear child, I need you as my instrument, and you will remain so. Be very quiet -endure with courage, I am with you in love and in victory."

Along with this ailment, he developed symptoms of prostatic enlargement in 1968. Dr. Sanyal recommended an operation. Pradyot wrote to the Mother, "I pray for your decision, whether or not to undergo an operation for the prostate. At present, I am wearing a catheter which can only be removed if the flow is restored. Life with a catheter is not specially attractive. I should like to serve you. Kindly grant this without an operation, if possible ;with an operation,if necessary."

The Mother, of course, vetoed the operation and he was free from the trouble. As an auxiliary measure, he took homoeopathic drugs for some time. Again in 1969 he wrote, "Mother, grant that I may collaborate entirely with you so that only what you will, happens to me and nothing else." The Mother replied, " It is already granted and for ever."

In another interesting letter in 1963 he wrote, "In a dream I met someone whose business seems to cause breakdowns in machines and plants. He and I came to an understanding, and he agreed to spare the works in which I am or may be interested. I do not know how seriously I am to take it, but it suggests a prayer, 'Grant that this is true as long as I work for you.' " Very Good", was the reply.

But it is not known when he developed the blood disease. It was in 1979 that the ailment was detected quite accidentally. He had gone to Calcutta in uncertain health to attend to his business. After a week or so he suddenly felt weak and uneasy and began to perspire without any apparent reason. Fortunately a doctor friend of his was near at hand. He transferred him at once to a nursing home of another intimate doctor friend. There the doctor, when he examined the patient's blood, was startled beyond words to discover that haemoglobin rate was very high. He was in extreme anxiety and wanted to send Pradyot back to the Ashram at the earliest, for the responsibility was too great for him. There was only one drug that could be effective; after a mad hunt all over Calcutta he found it. Pradyot remained unperturbed throughout, as if it were nothing serious. As soon as the condition had slightly improved he was sent back with a detailed account of his disease to our doctor. Here the blood was examined again and the diagnosis was confirmed. It was Dr. Bose who first told me the story with some alarm. Dr. Datta said that the condition was serious no doubt, but it could be kept under control with the specific drug. The disease itself was beyond cure. I was really shaken, but the marvel of it was that the patient was happy and cheerful as ever. He used to crack jokes and make fun of our medical science, but did not fail to abide by the medical directions. He had elicited from the doctor the truth about the nature, course and sequelae of the disease. Every month the blood used to be examined and the treatment regulated accordingly. I could not but admire Pradyot's sang-froid in this predicament. I am almost convinced that any other patient would have been half dead out of fear. But Pradyot had a well of strength in him and faith to boot.

With this ailment he had carried on his work from 1979 to 1984. There was no relaxation no abatement of his industry, not a moment's gloominess. He paid regular visits to Calcutta once a month. Two big responsibilities had settled upon his frail but resilient shoulders - D.C.P.L. and Lakshmi's House. The proprietor of the former, Sadhan Dutt, was most of the time abroad, leaving Pradyot to look after the firm in his absence. Then the palatial Lakshmi's House or Home of Grace as it came to be known had to be maintained and developed. It began to flourish in many directions. Pradyot used to relate with an inner pride the various activities going on and the functions held there, and showed us their various colourful photographs. One could realise that he was the head and crown of the institution.

The Bengal Government used to consult him from time to time regarding their engineering problems. Besides all these occupations, a constant stream of visitors approached him about various personal problems of health, family troubles, business concerns, etc. After a late dinner, he would chat with his close associates before retiring to bed. He was even looked upon as a *guru*. When the Mother heard about it, she said, "Not as a guru but a demi-god".

In short it was a life of hectic activities. At times he used to return to the Ashram quite fagged Out, but before he had recuperated he was ready for the next visit. We were really worried and the Trustees said once, "Pradyot's life is more precious to us than these occupations." Complaints from Lakshmi's House used to reach us that he was eating less,



but it mattered little to him. We noticed that his complexion was turning ash-grey. He was unusually harassed by mosquito-bites and used to remark. "Look, these dark spots - they are all due to mosquito-kisses. They must have found the taste of honey in my blood." Indeed, scattered stigmata of dark blood were visible in exposed parts of his body. Probably the increased haemoglobin content and therefore the increased density of the blood had a special attraction for mosquitoes. His light manner and jovial temper made us forget the lurking shadow and even believe that there was nothing seriously amiss. But at times I could not suppress my apprehension that he was living under the harrow of doom. He was, however, free from these ominous musings; he thought that there was no imminent danger. He would often repeat, "Man never dies from a disease. He dies because the soul decides."

On 6<sup>th</sup> November, he received the news that Charu Das, one of our close friends, had died. When he was not keeping well, Pradyot had him brought over to Lakshmi's House from Jamshedpur since there he had nobody to look after him. He was an X-ray operator at Tara Hospital. He was so efficient and popular there that all high officers could not but love him and even accepted his judgement in cases of doubtful reading of an X-ray film. A bachelor always cheerful and generous to a fault, he was the most remarkably simple man that I have come across. Such a friend's sudden death was a sore loss to Pradyot. He then came to see me and giving me the news in a grave tone said, "I have got his last offering. Can I go and give it to the Mother upstairs?" It was arranged accordingly. I observed how he tried to control himself. Otherwise a strong man, he used to be easily affected by the suffering or death of close relations.

He had returned from Calcutta a few days before 17<sup>th</sup> November. We were having tea on his spacious terrace and were talking about things in general. The talk turned to politics and Indira Gandhi. Visibly moved, he said, "Tears are very rarely seen in my eyes. But when I heard of Indira Gandhi's death, two drops rolled down". I echoed his sentiment and said, "Here at least we have a common trait."

Joya, Pradyot's secretary and "daughter" in Calcutta who was in charge of Lakshmi's House, had accompanied him, for she feared that everything was not well with him. She had noticed that Pradyot was suffering from a certain kind of malaise in his throat and was covering his neck with a piece of woollen cloth. This was an ominous sign for her, for on the eve of his first heart-attack she had observed the same kind of ailment with his throat. Hence she did not dare allow Pradyot to come alone, though he did not like that she should take any trouble. He said to her, "The Mother is my doctor and faith my medicine." On reaching the Ashram, Joya at once apprised Dr. Datta of her misgivings. Dr. Datta, heart-specialist and Pradyot's physician, took his blood and sent it to the General Hospital for examination. The report was not bad. The E.C.G, taken by Dr. Datta showed only signs of ischaemia; the heart was all right. When I went to see Pradyot, he had a cloth wrapped round his neck. He said, "Some uneasiness is there in the heart-region, but more than that this feeling of compression around the neck is rather unpleasant. What is it due to?" Some congestion, probably," I replied, but I was not sure. "The heart is all right, the doctor says," he said, and repeated it more than once as if to give reassurance to himself. Since there was

no relief, Dr. Datta had his blood examined again in our Laboratory. Now it was discovered that the haemoglobin content had gone up to a frightening degree. The doctor prescribed the specific drug, but its effect, he said, would be visible after a week. The other way was to let out a certain quantity of blood. This was of course, turned down.

Gargi related to me that one day when she and Pradyot were returning from their usual visit to the Ashram, Pradyot started sweating and was on the point of collapse. At once a car was fetched and he was put into it. She asked the driver to take a few rounds along the seaside. When they returned home, Pradyot asked, "What happened to me?" It seems he had been in the habit of going out of his body, and would then be totally unconscious of the surroundings.

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Here, it will be pertinent to digress for a while and add a few words about Gargi who became part and parcel of Pradyot's life in the Ashram. I discovered her for the first time in his house almost as a member of the family, as if Ranidi's daughter. She was a young girl and very pretty to look at. She used to call Ranidi 'Mummy' and help her in domestic work. She was certainly very useful to her in keeping the huge establishment in order and running on errands which Ranidi herself could not manage because of her age and reasons of health. As to how she made contact with the family, let her tell own story.

"I became an Ashramite in 1954. I was given work in the Dining Room and was doing it as best I could. At times I used to feel a keen longing for my father. I prayed to the Mother, "Mother, do give me my father's love. I miss him so much." After a few weeks some of us girl-friends had gone for a stroll on the sea-side and met our Daddy and Mummy. Taking us to be Ashram-girls, they accosted us and Daddy was curious to know about us. They asked about our life in the Ashram and other small details, as we went on walking together and chatting like long-acquainted friends. Feeling a closeness with him. I candidly told him about my occasional sadness for my father and that I had prayed to the Mother to give me my father's love. This meeting, I added, was perhaps brought about by her wish. I wrote to her my feeling towards Daddy on his birthday. The Mother asked him, "Gargi calls you Daddy? She is not keeping well. She can have her food at your place." This was in 1962. Mummy also accepted me gladly. This is how the Mother helped me to fill my void and my life with untold munificence. Mummy's love and care wrapped me all around. Daddy was a man of few words and always advised me to turn to the Mother, rely on her and live within. In this manner he took charge of my *sadhana*. Once I asked him, 'Daddy, what can I give you on my birthday?' He replied, "Give what you can, but never ask for anything, not even from me. Be an aristocrat". Though he spoke little, his sense of humour melted his gravity into ripples of sweetness. When I spoke at random, he pulled me up saying, "Try to hear the words before you speak."

Gargi took up her service to Pradyot as a work given to her by the Mother. After Ranidi's passing away it was Gargi's unremitting service that gave much relief to Pradyot's busy life. Continual flow of guests, friends and visitors in his house was ably looked after by her. Moreover, Pradyot himself needed personal attention, brought up as he had been with special care and affection from his childhood. At Calcutta, for instance, he had in his entourage a number of young people who used to call him Daddy and considered it a great privilege to be near him and serve him. Gargi would feed him like a child even in our presence and he would accept her motherly ministry without the least constraint. Pradyot had one supreme quality in him that he would never abandon a person who had loved him and sought his shelter.

I shall give an instance of Pradyot's deep love for Gargi. On 20<sup>th</sup> November, two days before the fatal day. Pradyot was chatting with his close circle at night. In the course of talk, he said to Gargi, "Look, Gargi. I shall sell you off at such a high price that nobody would be able to buy you".

This utterance was made apropos of an anecdote related by a friend on my birthday, 17<sup>th</sup> November. It is as follows: A small boy was playing all sorts of pranks with his mother. Getting annoyed, she gave him a gentle slap. Out of *abhiman*, the boy cried, 'Ma, you don't love me. I shall sell you off.' The mother with feigned gravity said, "Very well, I'm ready." "All right, but I will sell you at such a price that nobody will dare to come forth." The mother was overcome with tears and covered him with kisses.

Pradyot remembered that story and repeated it.

# CONVERSATIONS WITH THE MOTHER

Gargi discovered among things given into her custody some of the talks Pradyot had had with the Mother. As they are of inestimable value and in a way revealing, I am putting them here.

## **The present problem in the country and the solution**

P. I am going to Calcutta. There they will ask me one question regarding the present situation - communal riots. What is the solution ?

Mother : The solution is, of course, the change of consciousness. I know those other people behaved badly, like animals - even animals are better than human beings - but if people here also do the same, they are playing into the hands of the forces that make people do evil and strengthen the hold of these forces. Retaliation like that is no remedy.

P. People here feel frustrated, they see no remedy , do not know which way to go, whom to look up to. They are going the wrong way, following the wrong head. Isn't the division of the country responsible for much of these troubles?

Mother: Yes, division of religion, of country, of interest. If people felt like brothers, not brothers who quarrel, but conscious of their common origin -

P. When are you coming amongst us ?

Mother: Don't be under the illusion that I am not there. I am there, the force, the consciousness are there, but there is no receptivity. During the Chinese trouble. I was in those places in the front, concretely, but I am sorry to say that the only people who were receptive were the Chinese. Their impulsion to advance disappeared. That is receptivity. No one knew why they withdraw. On the Indian side a few were touched and they told me of terrible conditions.

Since World War II I have been keeping Kali quiet, but she is restless. Times are critical, anything may happen. If people will only give up their ego.

P. I shall suggest a simpler way, to turn to you.

Mother: Perhaps the time has come to tell what I have told you. You may talk if any occasion arises. Keep your faith and go like a warrior.

The Ashram, Pondicherry / 28.1.64



Mother: Yes, I have written in Prayers and Meditations that a day will come when the whole world will rise against the Divine and oppose his work, and the Divine will take the whole world into his arms.

3.3.1970

Question : You have asked us to help you.

How can I help you ? What am I to do ?

The Mother's answer : To concentrate and open to receive the New Progressive Consciousness, to receive new things which are coming down.

Pradyot : Someone has asked, " I have accepted the Mother as the Divine; has she accepted me ?"

Mother : It is the Guru who accepts or rejects. I am the Mother.

One day the Mother asked Pradyot, " What do you want?" Pradyot replied, " I want you." "It is not easy,". She shot back. "I don't ask for easy things," was the riposte.

# THE PASSING – A GLOWING SUN

## FULFILMENT OF THE FRIENDSHIP

The 17<sup>th</sup> was Darshan Day. Like others, Pradyot visited the Mother's Room. In the afternoon of the 18<sup>th</sup> he was to come to my birthday party. Suddenly at noon he turned up with Gargi and asked me to excuse him from attending the party, for he wanted to avoid the crowd. This was not his way. Naturally I protested saying, "How can that be? Come then at the very end." I missed the hint that he needed rest. He came, however. There were a few people. He took very little food. Somebody proposed to take our photograph. That was the last one of us together. Next day, when I went to see him, I learnt that the doctor had advised him not to move out of the house, particularly not to climb stairs. That meant he should not come to the Darshan of the 24<sup>th</sup>. He was discouraged.

To buck him up I said, "There are still a few days to go. Besides, it doesn't matter much." In the afternoon of the 22<sup>nd</sup> I went to see him; I found that Gargi and Joya were chatting with him and gently massaging his feet. In the lulls of the conversation it was as if he were trying to control his pain. He asked Gargi to show me the Mother's letter telling him, "An unshakable faith in the Divine's grace and no disharmony can resist its action." Dr. Datta arrived and took his blood pressure. After a short while, Pradyot went to the bathroom; Gargi followed him, I was told later that since the afternoon he had been taking a drug for heart-pain almost every hour. From the bathroom he went back to his bedroom and sent for us. I found him tired but he said he was free from pain. Then surprisingly, he added, "But if pain recurs at night, I don't know if I shall be able to bear it." Datta replied, "No, no, there won't be any pain. I am sticking this new medical plaster below your heart-region ; it will prevent the pain. You can take also the tablet if needed. I shall come back at 9 p.m." As I had to come away, I said, "I'm going Sahib. Keep well". He stretched his hand and gripped mine. That was not his habit, it was I who always would say, "Sahib, give me your hand. Your hand is so soft!" Truly so; it was the small hand of a child. Who would say it was an engineer's hand? Did his gesture mean that it was farewell for good?

Next day, the 23<sup>rd</sup>, I had finished my Samadhi work at 4 a.m. and was going back to my room when I saw Dyuman waiting for me. I thought he wanted news of Pradyot's condition. Instead it was he who delivered the dreadful news ; "Pradyot passed away last night at 11.30". "What ?" I cried . "Yes", he repeated. I was stunned. I felt my eyes grow moist. Dyuman continued, " I was called at night. They asked me to inform you. I said that you must be sleeping and I would give you the news on my return. I saw that Datta was giving intravenous saline or glucose. Suddenly at one time Pradyot started up restless and the next moment everything was quiet." Dyuman and I went at 4.30 a.m. to see the body. Pradyot was lying calmly on a spacious bed, like a prince, the Mother's picture with the lion shining at his head!

Later on, I was told that when Datta had arrived he had noticed Pradyot's blood pressure going down. He had given an injection and a saline transfusion. He had not given up hope. But Pradyot woke up from sleep in an agitated condition as if looking for something or somebody, sat up and was trying to get up. Gargi sat by his side, and asked him to utter "Ma, Ma." He opened his lips, made an inaudible movement and breathed his last. One Ashram boy who witnessed this moment said, 'It seemed the Mother Herself had come to take him to relieve him from pain and Pradyot's physical was so conscious that it responded immediately.'

In the first part of the night, that is around 11 p.m. while I was sleeping in Sri Aurobindo's room, I had a dream. Through a window I saw in the eastern sky in the midst of clouds a bright golden sun. I wondered what it meant. It happened to be the time when Pradyot's soul left.

The previous night Pradyot had chatted with his intimate circle till midnight. He was in a self-revealing mood and reiterated his conviction that one does not die unless the soul decides. He also said to Gargi that the coming night would be critical for her. Then in a somewhat dreamy tone he recalled that the Divine had given him name, fame, friends, position, money - things that man desires. He had nothing to complain of. He had been taken care of by some invisible Hand in all his ventures. However, he had quite his fill of diseases - gastric ulcer, colitis, prostate-enlargement and lastly blood-cancer. "For many years, haven't enjoyed what may be called sound health, but it mattered little. I haven't stopped my work. I have succeeded in changing my pain into *ananda*, but couldn't cure it," he added.

The body was to be taken for cremation in the afternoon of the 23<sup>rd</sup>. Gargi heard clearly her Daddy's voice: "You people must not go there. I am going to my work. The sadhak always looks forward not backward".

This was Pradyot's true soul-scripture: work, service, instead of dragging on with a disabled frame, to come back equipped with a new body was the secret of his departure. So, when he had realised that his illness was incurable and there would be a painful existence, he was not sorry to go.

Very few, except his most close ones, will miss him in the Ashram, for his services to the Ashram are not known so well. To quite a number he figured only as one of the Trustees. But Lakshmi's House and D.C.P.L. at Calcutta (including the Kuljian Corporation ) bear the seal and signature of his creative genius. His unwavering faith in the Mother's force was the keystone of his success. And no sacrifice was too much even the sacrifice of his life. His self-effacement used to come out so well even in his childlike pranam at the feet of the Mother. The Mother has showered on him many compliments. I have mentioned some. Another was , "You don't suffer from amour- propre"

Daddy's Children and members of the Sri Aurobindo Institute of Culture at Calcutta paid on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1984 their respectful homage with love and gratitude to their beloved



“Daddy” and Chairman of the Institute at Lakshmi’s House. On this occasion, we have been told, there was a large gathering; all the front-rank engineers of Calcutta, besides other notable persons, had come to offer their tribute. Sadhan, his *manasaputra*, said that he could never repay what he had received from Pradyod. Let us hope these devoted children of their ‘Daddy’ will hold aloft the touch he had lighted burning and mounting like a fire of sacrifice.

Finally, as I lie in my bed, my thoughts wing back to the past and I see this pageant passing across the mind’s screen. Two boys get admission into the Government School of the town in the same class. A romantic friendship grows up between them, though they are different in every way : nature, character, complexion, intelligence and religion. One vital and impulsive, the other mental and moral. And that friendship is devoid of any outer expression. For five years they grow together, yet hardly five words do they exchange. After the Matric. Exam., one joins the Gandhi movement, and goes to jail, the other obtains a scholarship and joins the local College. After a year both meet in the same College - one studying Arts, the other Science. Passing their intermediate , they sail for England, one to Edinburgh the other to Glasgow. There the barrier of reserve and shyness falls down and the foreign climate knits them closer. The engineer takes up, after his return, job in Tata’s. The doctor goes to Burma, the bond almost forgotten. After three years of a chequered life the doctor comes away to the Ashram, while the other steps up the ladder to the top and becomes a legendary name in the Engineering world! The doctor tries to draw his friend to the Ashram. The friend responds, but the root is not deep yet. A sudden change intervenes; he inclines towards the Mother. From then, the sleeping child-angel in him awakes and comes closer to her, while the other is hooked on to Sri Aurobindo. The child, nourished by the Mother’s love, develops like the arc of the moon and when on the verge of becoming the full orb, the moon sets to rise elsewhere. The friend remains behind and continues his pilgrimage. But the question abides : what mystery was behind the strange friendship ?

Perhaps the clue to the mystery is to be found in one talk of the Mother’s where she says that we have met before in previous lives. We have taken birth in different regions to serve some noble cause and in this life we have met to work together for a divine purpose.



31 . 8 . 7

Bonne Fête

to Pradyot

with love and  
blessings for the  
shining of his  
conscience in the  
Divine Consciousness



Nirodbaran & Pradyot Kumar Bhattacharya

(This photograph of Nirodbaran and Pradyot Kumar Bhattacharya was taken on the 18th November, 1984 at Pondicherry. This is the last photograph of Pradyotda)

In the early thirties Nirodbaran joined Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry after returning from England as a qualified doctor. He came to the Ashram with the intention of practising Yoga, and here he found to his surprise that poetry was one of the vocations taken up by some disciples as a means of Sadhana. Sri Aurobindo was giving inspiration to them and taking active interest in their writings. Nirodbaran, too, indulged in his “eccentric innovations” without knowing anything about English metrical forms. Beginning in a mystic-surrealistic vein the poems progressed towards “overhead poetry” for it was Sri Aurobindo who guided the poet to perfection in his work. Some of the outstanding publications of Nirodbaran are *Talks with Sri Aurobindo, Vols I, II, III, Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo, Vols I & II, Sri Aurobindo’s Humour, Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo, Sweetness and Light, Sun-Blossoms, Fifty Poems* with corrections and comments by Sri Aurobindo and some others in Bengali.

