



*My Friend  
and  
My Master*

C. C. DUTT

**My Friend  
and  
My Master**

by  
C.C. Dutt

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## Foreword

This is a personal account of Sri Aurobindo's pre-Ashram days told by C.C.Dutt, who had been a revolutionary comrade and later became a spiritual disciple of Sri Aurobindo in his ashram. C.C. Dutt's memoir carries an unmistakable direct presence of the Guide and Master and vivid experience that can only occur in the immediate closeness to the Guru. It will be of a great interest to all those who have been guided on their spiritual paths by Sri Aurobindo's words and presence.

## A Memoir by C. C. Dutt

Last year, I wrote two articles describing my connection with Sri Aurobindo in the field of secret political work. He approved of both the writings and they were duly published in two special numbers of the Amrita Bazar Patrika. There were, however, many things of a more or less intimate nature which, out of delicacy, I kept back at the time. Many of my friends have, of late, been pressing me to write about them. Still, I have hesitated for several months. Since the passing away of the Master, strange tales about his earlier life have been sprouting out, like mushrooms, all around us. The phenomenon is natural enough after a long period of reticence and it can do harm, for Sri Aurobindo is above human appraisal. But in this atmosphere, I feel very shy about unpacking my bundle of rags, invaluable though they are to me. If he had but once glanced at them, they would have turned to priceless shawl and brocade. Still he is my all, and, wherever he may be, I am sure he would protect me and guide me. I look for no protection against censure, for censure is to me a laurel crown; it is guidance I need as to what can be said and how. In the matter of very intimate experiences, human language is an inadequate medium of expression. My readers have probably heard of the great mystic of Sindh, Shah Latif. He has told a story, something like this, bearing on the point: One day, I was sitting by the village well meditating on my beloved. (The Sufi loves to call God his beloved, his M'ashuqa). The women of the village were coming and going with their pots. Suddenly I saw three very pretty girls, approaching the well. As they passed by me laughing merrily, I heard them speaking of the delirious joy they had felt in their husbands' company the night before. One of them, the youngest, was shy and

spoke very little. The other two chafed her and said, "What, little one, you did not experience any joy!" "Joy!" was the reply, "Yes, sister, very great joy. But how can I describe it in words!" They passed along. I closed my eyes and said to my beloved, "Truly, M'ashuqa, can that bliss be described!"

Do I not know the ecstasy of union with my Master? Of course I do, but without his Grace I cannot convey it to others. Well, I lay my difficulty at his feet, let him solve it as he will. I never hesitate to tell him anything. Face to face with him, all sense of awe and fear, of shyness and shame vanishes into thin air — a soft sweet rosy light of love pervades me. But am I so unfortunate as not to know that my Aurobindo is also the Lord of all — and the Supreme transcending all? No, I certainly know him to be all this, but my direct perception, my intimate contact is of the Lord of my heart. If he leads me to realise His other aspects, I shall realise them. When on the 5th of December last, at early dawn, I saw him in his last sleep, tears gushed out of my eyes and I said almost audibly, "I shall never see that sweet face again!" I wept then for my friend, comrade and master of yore who had passed away — not for the Lord of the Universe who is deathless. Thereafter he consoled me and I wept no more. But a void remained in the heart, a hidden grief that something that was is no more. But it is equally true that He is ever present within me, present more intensely than he had been before.

In the remote past, when I was a school-boy, Benoy, the eldest brother of Aurobindo, came to live in our little town. He used to regale us with interesting stories of many lands, and spoke often of his favourite brother, Auro, of his sweet temper and brilliant genius, of the fend love that their father bore him. But along with all this lavish praise he would always refer to his brother's stubborn

nature — “But, my Jove! he was obstinate as a mule!” Now, we are all familiar with the old portrait of Sri Aurobindo as a boy of eleven. His brilliant intelligence and sweet temper are apparent enough therein, but there is nothing to indicate that he was “obstinate as a mule”. In his actual life, however, we have had many instances of an imbedding nature, that is to say, of firm determination rather than of stubbornness. His famous letters to his wife amply indicate this firmness, along with a loving and affectionate nature. His failure to appear at the riding test in England was no idle whim. As he explained to me one day, it was the least unpleasant way of letting his father know that he did not want to join the I.C.S. I always looked upon Aurobindo as a resolute man, — a man who knew his mind. As my revolutionary chief he was never whimsical or capricious. But his outstanding quality was an infinite compassion, his justice was ever tempered by mercy. I am speaking, just now, of the period before his final departure from Calcutta, when he acted principally under the guidance of his rational intelligence. Once in 1907, a report came to him that a certain young revolutionary worker had been guilty of grave misconduct. I was then in Calcutta. Ordinarily, in such cases, we took the necessary action and informed him of it. But he took up this particular case himself and ordered a very severe punishment. When he told me of it, I assured him that his order would be carried out without delay. My difficulty was that I was not myself convinced of the young fellow’s guilt. But it was not for me to reason why, when I received an order. So I issued the necessary directions. Next morning, I found him sitting listlessly with a sad look on his face and asked, “You are quite well, Chief?” He replied, “I don’t feel comfortable about that matter of yesterday. Have I been hasty? You never said anything, Charu!” “Do I ever say anything when you issue an order?” I got up promptly and walked out saying, “Let me see how

far things have gone. If at all possible, I shall stay execution of your order." Luckily it was not too late and the previous order was countermanded. His mercy stepped in to temper the severity of his justice. Those who have had the good fortune of attending on the Master personally here in the Ashram, have had daily experience of his sweet temper and his beautiful smile. But we others, we have seen instances, too, where a sadhak, gone astray, was recklessly proceeding to dig his own grave, while the Master was trying persistently to save him. The Lord of the sinful, the Lord of the destitute, the Lord of the weak, has ever been like this!

When in 1890 I came to Calcutta for my studies, I used to hear a great deal about Aurobindo Ghose. Whatever we heard astonished us greatly. The son of a rabidly Europeanised man like Dr. K.D. Ghose, a boy brought up in England from early boyhood, has so thoroughly Indianised himself in his dress and food and habits that people can never cease talking of it. And when he married, he chose a very young Bengali bride and went through the whole of the old-fashioned Hindu rites! People told us that he was a man vastly learned in Western lore and was now engaged diligently in learning Sanskrit and various modern Indian languages. Young as we were, we could not quite tally things. But we said often to ourselves that Bhupal Babu's little girl, Minu, was indeed a lucky wife. Her clever husband was bound to be the Diwan of Baroda one day. I had always been very anxious to have a glimpse of this prodigy, but had no luck. In 1896, I went away to Europe for a few years, and it was not till my return home that I met him casually on the Baroda station platform, as I have already stated elsewhere.

In the seventies of the last century, when the famous Keshub Chandra Sen had gone to England, he had created a sensation, and the Punch wrote of him: "Who is this Keshub Chandra Sen? Bigger than a bull, smaller than a wren, is this Keshub Chandra Sen?"

Twenty years later, much the same question passed and repassed in the Indian mind with regard to Aurobindo Ghose. Who and what is this wonderful young man? Is he going to be somebody truly great or is he going to drop and wither like so many others?

And what did his English fellow-students think of him? A couple of very short stories would give my readers some indication of this. In the second year of my service, (I had not met Aurobindo as yet,) I had a boss of the name of Percy Mead. He was a very nice fellow, only a little older than myself. Once, while we were camping not far from each other, he asked me to go over to his camp the next day, saying, "There are some important matters pending, which we can fix up when we meet. Then we shall have a short walk, a simple meal and a long chat. In the morning I shall ride with you a part of the way to your camp." I rode up, accordingly, to Mead's camp the next day, arriving at about 4 p.m. The work took us about an hour to finish. After that we rambled in the fields till dusk. After a quick dinner we chatted for a couple of hours on a variety of things, big and small, and got into bed about midnight. In a little while, Mead called out, "Dutt, are you a Bengali?" I said, "I am, but why do you ask?" He replied, "There was an Indian student in my days, at the 'Varsity, a great classical scholar, who had well-nigh beaten all record in Latin and Greek. His name was Aurobindo Akroyd Ghose. I knew him well. In fact, he helped me materially in my studies. Do you know him? I have an idea that he was a Bengali, though some fellows, because of his English middle name, said he was a Christian." I laughed, "No, he is not a Christian, he is a Hindu Bengali. I know his people, but I have not actually met him as yet. He is the vice-principal of the Baroda college." Mead said, "It is a pity that the man is an Indian and has had to come to this country. He would have been a famous professor in Cambridge.

Well, Dutt, remember me to him when you meet him and tell

him Percy Mead of Cambridge was inquiring after him. Good night"! A couple of years later, I recounted the tale to Aurobindo. He replied promptly, "Yes, I remember young Mead. He was a nice fellow, not stuck up like the average public school man."

Another English civilian, once a fellow-student of Aurobindo, made a funny remark to me, some years later: "Fancy, Ghose a ragged revolutionary! He can with far greater ease write a big lexicon or compose a noble epic." I have forgotten the man's name, but he had a great regard for his fellow-student of the old days. I wonder if he is still alive and has read "Savitri". Truth to tell, no one understood my chief, not even his clever Maharaja. In 1907, when I met His Highness in Baroda, he said to me quite solemnly, "Try and persuade your friend not to resign from his job here. Let him go on extending his leave. Otherwise they are sure to lock him up." When I told Aurobindo this, he laughed out, "The old man will never understand my politics. Still, he is fond of me, I suppose. Of course, you would say it is the fondness of the Moslem housewife for the fowl that she is fattening up for the festive meal." But I was always sure that I understood his politics. I had a fear all along that he would suddenly leave us, one day, to go up to a higher plane. Well, has he not done so more than once? From Baroda to Calcutta, from Calcutta to Pondicherry, from Pondicherry to another world, as soon as he received the call from within, or from above! As long as I did not realise that he was the embodied Divine, I tried to appraise his actions by my intellect. That he was always a Yogi, a Seeker, I never doubted. Towards the end of his Baroda days, he initiated Deshpande and Madhavrao in the Omkar Mantra, and they practised it assiduously. What he did, or tried to do, all along, for an absolute duffer like me, I am going to relate presently. When the time truly came for me to enter the spiritual path, he took a decisive step. His compassion towards me was

boundless. He had gone on preparing me by a series of very subtle steps, before he finally threw wide open the portals of my heart. All this I shall recount, as I go on.

In 1910, at the end of my compulsory furlough, I rejoined my job in Sindh. The chief left Calcutta the same year and took up a new line of work here in Pondicherry. (All this I have related already.) In 1925, I retired from service and took up residence in Bengal. For some time I had to encounter very stormy and inclement weather, and my wife used to tell me constantly, "Go and see Ghose Saheb; he will give you peace." But I could not get over my huff as yet; I could not forget how he had deserted us, at a critical time. I worked for Rabindranath for about seven years. I took up literary work. I dabbled in art.

But nothing brought me peace. Probably association with the great poet somewhat broadened my narrow and blood-thirsty patriotism. I was, however, nothing to speak of. Occasionally some letters of Sri Aurobindo came to my hand; I read them eagerly, but without much understanding. About this time, a young sadhak of the Pondicherry Ashram wrote a very kind letter to me, somewhat in this strain, "There are many of us here, who are very keen on meeting you. Won't you pay us a short visit?" However much of a rationalist I might have been, I believed that these people were in quest of something sublime and, what is more, they had, in their Master, the greatest spiritual personality of the age. Still, I did not respond to the cordial invitation of this young Yogi. I wrote to him, "I shall not go to your Ashram to satisfy my curiosity. When I go, it will be to offer myself." Idle words! For, today, I know whose loving hand was invisibly pulling the strings the whole time, unfit though I was for a spiritual life.

At this time, I was fully occupied in writing on a variety of

subjects—physical sciences for the young, a biography of Shivaji for the University, a history of the national movement for the Congress, novels and short stories for the general reader and a number of reviews for periodicals. Strangely enough, it was a writing of this last class that changed the whole tenor of my life. It was like this. I wrote a very long review of Jawaharlal's Autobiography in the Viswa-Bharati quarterly, which attracted some notice, at least of people who knew me. A sadhak of the Pondicherry Ashram sent this review up to Sri Aurobindo with certain words of hyperbolic praise about myself and asked this question, "Did you, Guru, have any contact with this gentleman of yore? Political?" The reply of the Master came down promptly, "Charu Dutt? Yes, saw very little of him, for physically our ways lay far apart, but that little was very intimate, one of the band of men I used most to appreciate and felt as if they had been my friends, comrades and fellow-warriors in the battle of the ages and would be so for ages more. But curiously enough, my physical contact with men of his type, there were two or three others, was always brief. Because I had something else to do this time, I suppose."

The young sadhak sent this reply to me at Calcutta. On seeing it I was overwhelmed by a sense of shape and sorrow. I sat stupefied for a while. Then my wife said, "I have told you so often before. Go to him for a while, he will give you peace". I wrote immediately to my Pondicherry friend, "The time has come for my pilgrimage to your Ashram. Please take Sri Aurobindo's permission and make necessary arrangements." What wonderful Grace! Here I am, an insignificant person; for thirty whole years I have, through a stupid huff, kept away from Him and spoken irreverently of Him, at least in my thoughts, and He, the great Soul, has been, unknown to me, drawing me, gently but persistently to His feet, once again. The reply from Pondicherry came promptly. Sri Aurobindo has

permitted me to be present at the next February Darshan. Not only has he accorded his gracious permission, but has cracked a homely joke at my expense — “Does he still smoke that old pipe of his? If so, how can he live in the Ashram?” I was then, in a very happy mood. I replied, “Tell Sri Aurobindo that my pipe is my servant; I am its master”. Thus far it was easy enough; but I was a stranger to the Mother of the Ashram! So much had I heard about her, both from devotees and her detractors! I had paid no heed to things that people said of her. It was easy enough to see that she was a remarkable and powerful personality. I had in the past come into contact with great European women like Mrs. Besant and Sister Nivedita, but there never was any question there of my prostrating myself before them, they were not Divine personalities! However, these things had not passed through my mind before I was actually face to face with Mother in Pondicherry. When the difficulty arose, the Master himself in his infinite Mercy, solved it for me. Otherwise my Yoga would have ended even at its commencement. It is best that I should own up to what happened. In these days, there used to be a general blessing by the Mother, on the eve of the Darshan. Along with others, I filed into the meditation hall escorted by a kind friend. At the very last moment, the thought passed through my mind, — “If I do not feel inclined to touch the feet of this European lady what then?” I decided immediately that I would not play the hypocrite. If I did not feel disposed to touch the Mother’s feet, I would just do an ordinary namaskar by raising my joined hands to the forehead, and then, immediately on returning to my quarters, I would write a letter to her — “Revered Mother, unable to fall in with the Ashram discipline, I am leaving Pondicherry forthwith.” The Master saved me from this dire disaster. As soon as I glimpsed the Mother’s radiant feet, I cried to myself “Fool, fool! You thought these were human feet!” and rushed forward to seize them. A

powerful current passed through my frame, and the problem of the Mother's personality was solved for ever. On the morrow of the Darshan, Nirodbaran, the Master's constant attendant, asked me, "What happened, Sir? Why did the Master say, — 'So, Charu Dutt did bow down before the Mother!'" I explained, in all pride, to the friends present, how the Master had saved me.

Let me, now, describe in short my first Darshan of Sri Aurobindo. My reader can easily imagine how with trembling feet and a heart all aflutter I crossed the threshold of the hall. I had my eyes closed. At the time when I faced the throne, I opened my eyes and had just one glimpse of a face, sky-blue in tint, a shadowy peacock feather on the head. A beautiful benign face, but I could not bear to look at it again. I averted my face and walked away. My one thought, if I had any thought at all at the time, was that I must not break down. A couple of days later, Puraniji, an old sadhak, came to see me and said, "Charu Babu, I asked Sri Aurobindo — 'How did you find your old friend, Sir?' — He laughed and replied — 'Charu would not let me have a look at him.'" It was perfectly true. How could I look him in the face! Thus began my sadhana. Who knows, probably I am still going round and round the starting point! But one thing is quite clear to me. It is that I have received His Grace and that the end is certain.

The very first time that I had the chance I submitted to the Mother that I was absolutely ignorant of things divine and that my sole spiritual observance was the nightly recital of a very short prayer that my own mother had taught me in my infancy. The Divine Mother solemnly looked into my eyes and assured me that my prayers would be guided in future. And guided they have been, steadily and effectively. That earnest look of the Mother was my initiation.

There are one or two tales to relate in this connection. For several years, I had the habit of reading the whole Gita daily, — the kind of reading known as Parayana, where the words and their significance flow side by side spontaneously. But this was a habit cultivated within the last 25 years. During the first decade of this century, when I came within Aurobindo's orbit, I was a casual Gita student, reading that scripture with the help of the commentaries and thinking out the meaning in the usual way. I never, however, studied it with Aurobindo. He discussed history and politics with me, read poetry and drama to me in many languages, but never attempted to teach me religion or philosophy. As I have mentioned already, he had given some spiritual instruction to a couple of friends in Baroda; but when, one day, I put him one or two questions about sadhana, he put me off summarily by saying, "Not yet". But, really speaking, he had never been indifferent to my spiritual welfare. He gave me only as much as I was capable of receiving at the time. I understood the mantra "Bande Mataram". So he tacked me on to the realisation thereof, in Karma. Still, my being was not satisfied, subconsciously it craved for subtler gifts. In 1906, I said one day to him, "You give so many nice things to others. I have a request to make today for myself. Let me have an old copy of the Gita, one that you have handled for some time." He said nothing at the time but when he came to me again he brought me a very well-thumbed copy of the Gita. He gave it to me very lightly and I took it from him very lightly too. But the real meaning of this giving and taking appeared to me forty years later. When, in 1908, I burnt all his letters and destroyed all books bearing his name, I managed to preserve this Gita, though it has in it some writing in Devanagari. The book is very old and the pages brittle. So we have never touched it except just to do a pranam occasionally. In 1946, one morning, I don't know why, I said to the

Mother, "Ma Mère, Sri Aurobindo gave me a copy of the Gita forty years ago. I want you to keep it." Next morning I handled the book over to her. Soon after this, there came on a Darshan day. After the ceremony was over, at 5 P.M., Nirod came to our house carrying something inside his scarf. He called out from the gate. "What will you give me, Sir?" I replied, "Anything you desire." He came forward and put the old Gita in my hand saying solemnly, "I am repeating Sri Aurobindo's words, Sir — 'I gave you the Gita in 1906 and asked you to keep it. I give it to you again today and ask you to keep.'" Thus he gave me this priceless book twice — once as my friend, the second time as my Lord and Master, showing clearly that both were the same.

In that remote age, there was another thing, a very subtle thing that Aurobindo gave me. It is still with me, secretly installed in my heart. It was of great use to me at one time; but ever since the Master and the Mother have taken up abode in the recesses of my heart, its work has become secondary. Still there it is, ever ready to help me. Let me explain more clearly. In those days, I had a very strange faculty (not Yogic, because I knew no Yoga). If I sat still absent-mindedly, especially in the dark or half dark, I felt clearly my blood coursing in my veins and arteries and consequently I could count quite easily the beating of my pulse. Still more strange was my power to look inside my thorax and abdomen and see clearly my internal organs — heart, lungs, liver, etc. I had only to concentrate for a little while to be able to do this. Aurobindo knew of this queer faculty of mine, but never encouraged me in any way. One day, in ordinary conversation, I said to him, "Aurobindo, why don't you give me some nice object on which I can concentrate more easily." This time he did not say, "Not yet", to put me off summarily. But he did not give any assurance either. He went back to Baroda in a couple of days. Soon afterwards I had this peculiar

experience. It was a dark drizzly evening. I was stretched in my long chair with eyes closed. Suddenly my gaze turned inwards. I visualised not only the inside of my chest but saw clearly inside my heart, seated in Padmasan, an entrancing figure, all made of light, — a Yogi In meditation. The face was beautiful but resembled no face that I had ever known. That luminous image has been with me ever since, and, at all times, I have found it absolutely easy to be concentrated on it. Latterly the face of the image has sometimes got mixed up with the Master's face, but not often. Aurobindo never admitted that he had given any such image to me. Whenever I questioned him, he replied in an off hand way, "O! That image of yours? I know nothing about it." Of course, there is no longer any need for speculation. A direct path of approach has been opened up by the Mother in my heart.

It was at this same period that Aurobindo wrote to me once from Baroda, asking me, "When you sit in silent concentration(or absent-mindedly, as you call it), do you see any colours? One colour or many colours?" I replied, "Always one colour, a beautiful rosy light, but, why this question?" There was no reply. When he came to me again. I chaffed him saying, "You had better not let me see any colour other than blood-red, Chief; otherwise your work is likely to suffer." He mumbled in a preoccupied way, "My work! True." Thus we met from time to time and again parted. But he knew always that I was his devoted and faithful friend. For, as I came to realise in 1940, he had never really forsaken me. The parting in 1910 was, for me, indeed hard to bear. The pain of that separation I nursed in my mind for thirty whole years. At the very first opportunity, I laid bare my lacerated heart before the Mother.

She asked me in all tenderness, "Do you understand now, why Sri Aurobindo came away here in 1910?" I answered gaily, "Yes, I do, Mother. As soon as I understood it, I ran up to you." My bark

had at last reached its haven and I was indeed happy.

There has been, till very recently, a lot of discussion about the Master's move from Calcutta to Chandernagore and again, from the latter town to Pondicherry. Some malicious people have been deliberately spreading lies to belittle him and to cast dirt on his character. In this connection I had the great good fortune of receiving a long letter from Sri Aurobindo. He stated clearly therein people did not believe this and continue to put their own interpretation on his movements. The least offensive was what his friend Shyamsundar once said (in imitation of the cowherd of Brindaban) — "My Kanai has gone to Mathura and put on a royal head-gear."

Let that be. I found my Kanu again in 1940. He was wearing the divine peacock feather on his head. But, as I have stated already, I could cast but one stolen fleeting glance at him, during the first Darshan. In the August Darshan my wife was with me. We gazed at him to our hearts' content. On the morrow, Purani came to us and said, "Do you know what Sri Aurobindo said yesterday? — 'This time I had a good look at Charu, and I recognised Lilavati quite easily'."

I have omitted to relate an experience which I had on my return to Calcutta after the first Darshan. Let me tell the story fully. It may have a subtle meaning. As I saw Sri Aurobindo, that first time, there was a sky-blue radiance about him and he had a peacock feather on his head. I have already mentioned this. Everyone does not see him like this, but I certainly did. And there was a subtle reason for it. In 1937, I was in bed, for several weeks, with severe pain in my knees. When I recovered, a sister-in-law of mine said to me, "Brother, during your illness, I made a vow to my Govindaji, that you would after recovery put a Bakul garland round his neck twice a year —

on Dol Purnima and Ras Purnima. Have I acted wrongly?" I said with some hesitation, "You should have taken my permission first, sister. But never mind. I shall fulfil your vow in your name." Accordingly, I garlanded the deity several times on the specific days. To my knowledge, I did it mechanically without even bowing down to the image. But who knows what was happening subconsciously! In another way, too, I was in close touch with the image of the divine Flute-Player. At that period, for some years, I used to paint Dhyan images of our Gods and Goddess, in the Indian way. I never got to be good at it, but I pursued the art very diligently. My favourite subject was Krishna the flute-player, and I had done over twenty-five pictures of Him. All this might have something to do with my first view of Sri Aurobindo in February, 1940. My understanding is too crude to account for it. But what happened a few days later cannot, by any means, be called an affair of the mind. My nephew received me at Howrah on my return from Pondicherry in March and took me straight on to their shrine of Govindaji, saying that it was Dol Purnima day and I had to garland the Deity. As usual, I approached Govindaji with the garland of bakul. But it was no earthen image that I saw this time. Govinda opened his eyes with a gentle smile, and looked at me, exactly as Sri Aurobindo had done at Pondicherry. The resemblance was truly striking! I took two handfuls of the festive red powder and smeared his cheeks saying "If this is what you willed to do, why did you make me wait so long!" There was a crowd of devotees present who shouted out "Jai Govindaji". I did not, however, continue garlanding our household deity for long. My sister, the devotee of the God, gave me my release a year later, saying, "You have now got your own Govindaji, Dada!"

And, truly, Govinda had become mine definitely. There is no doubt about it. The beautiful face of the blue boy of Brindaban, with

his bewitching smile, is ever present in my heart. I am not a learned man; in all probability I am not even a true lover of learning; the God of wisdom is, to me, a distant divinity. But the charmer of my heart I know and understand, by the very force of my love. I cannot resist the temptation of recounting a rather childish tale. It was not long ago. On the morrow of our Darshan, while receiving the flower garland from the Mother, I said to her, "My Mother, how beautiful Sri Aurobindo was yesterday!" The Mother replied with a benign smile, "Wasn't he magnificent (magnifique)?" Something prompted me to say, "Not magnificent, Mother! He was charming (charmant)." Later on, when I heard that the Mother had repeated this bit of childishness to the Master, my heart was full. I felt as if my tribute of tender love had reached Him.

Let me tell one or two very short tales about a sadhak's contact with his Master. I have already recounted how I smeared Govindaji's image with the festive red powder in Calcutta. Subsequently, I was, once, seized with a keen desire to put some red Abir on the feet of my living Govinda. How could it be done? We discussed the question again and again at home. At last, when the day of the festival arrived, my wife solved the problem by going straight up to the Mother and laying our earnest desire at her feet. The Gracious Mother agreed at once to put some red Abir, on the Master's feet, on our behalf. Next morning she gave us the powder sanctified by the touch of His feet.

The other story also indicates the Mother's great compassion. In those days I had been, for some years, in the habit of turning the rosary, while meditating on the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. One morning, I said to the former on the staircase, "My Mother, I am in the habit of turning my rosary daily. May I bring it up tomorrow and place it at your feet? I am very keen on it." Needless to say, I got her permission immediately. Next morning, as I touched her feet

with the rosary, I was prompted to say, "Mother, is it possible to place this rosary at Sri Aurobindo's feet?" The Mother smiled benignly and replied, "Why not? Give it to me. I shall do it today." On the morrow, I got my rosary back. The Mother said, "I told Sri Aurobindo that it was yours." I was in raptures.

During these last few years, when, like so many others, the only glimpse I had of him was for five or six seconds at Darshan time, the heart was ever thirsty for closer contact with him. I shall not recount here, my visions of him in sleep and in meditation: Many of these I have brought to the Mother's notice, from time to time, and that has given me intense satisfaction. But I have had contact with the Master in my waking moments too. Of a few of these, I shall tell my readers here. Contact with a Divine personality does not occur through the eyes alone. The ears play a very important part, at times. For several months, I, along with a few others, used to sit at the head of the main staircase, early every morning, to receive the Mother's blessings. Almost invariably we used to hear the Master doing his exercises in bed and felt his presence almost tangibly. Then, when he came to stay in the Darshan hall for a few weeks, we could sometimes hear from downstairs, a gentle cough or a word uttered, now and then, during Nirod's perusal of the papers. Also, sometimes, standing in Amrita's room, I would hear the Master's footsteps as he walked upstairs. All these were invaluable experiences in the path of Yoga. But, one particular experience which I had some three years ago, is well worth recounting. I was having an afternoon nap one day when, all of a sudden, feeling a tremendous upheaval of some sort inside me, I sat up in bed, bathed in perspiration. Five minutes later, I went into the next room and stretched myself in a long chair still feeling rather dazed. Dr. Nirod appeared unexpectedly and said that the Master had sent him to ask me a particular question. The question was very

unimportant, and yet such as could be answered by me alone in this place. I asked Nirod when Sri Aurobindo had given him the mandate. He replied, "Just about a quarter of an hour ago." It was, then, at that precise moment that I had felt such a tremendous tug inside. My response to the Master's recollection of me!

I have said already that Sri Aurobindo wrote a letter to me on the subject of his visit to Chandernagore. He had said to Purani the evening before, "I have got to write to Charu tomorrow morning; remind me of it, Purani." Again, at midnight, he called out to Purani from his bed, "I have to write to Charu early in the morning, don't forget." Before I left for Calcutta the next day, I received the letter from Nolini Babu. After thirty-five years, a letter in his handwriting came to my hand. It thrilled me. But he, too, as Purani told me in the morning, was thinking of the letter, the previous evening, off and on. Herein lies the infinite Mercy of the Divine towards his humble devotee.

In speaking of Divine Mercy, can we differentiate between the Mercy of Sri Aurobindo and that of the Mother? In truth, we cannot think of the one separately from the other. In my first Darshan, I made two pranams, one to each. But it was only just that once! I never committed the mistake again. Even today, when apparently the Mother alone sits and receives our pranams, do we not all know that the Master is always behind her? Has he not taught us this external Truth again and again, in words and action! In 1940, when, I came to Pondicherry first, I was much feebler physically than I am today. By whose grace, have I grown stronger? Of Sri Aurobindo alone? Of the Mother alone? I shall relate a short tale by way of reply. About five years ago, one morning, as I was doing my pranam to the Mother, I was suddenly prompted to say, "My Mother, I have one great sorrow in my life. Being something of a cripple, I cannot put my forehead on your feet, like the others." The

gracious Mother replied, "That is easily remedied! You can sit two steps below where I stand, and put your forehead on my feet". Two mornings in succession I did this and I was in raptures. On the third day, I said to the Mother, "Mother, you have fulfilled my heart's desire, and satisfied me completely. I shall not trouble you again. From tomorrow I shall touch your feet with my hands as usual." Two days later came the Darshan. I did not know if the Mother had told Sri Aurobindo anything. But I saw that he looked me all over from head to toe as I approached and, as I learnt from my wife and one or two others who were just behind, the Master's eyes followed me as I walked away, as far as I was visible. From that day the stiffness of my knees went on decreasing rapidly. This sort of thing is happening constantly here, as everyone knows. Call it a miracle or not, as you like! I call it Divine Grace — the Grace of the Master and the Mother.

But that people outside are constantly asking is this, was there anything miraculous visible in Sri Aurobindo's actions before he came to Pondicherry? I shall not in reply say either yes or no, but relate certain small incidents directly within my knowledge, and leave the reader to draw his own conclusions. I am not claiming for my Master any occult powers. I shall be satisfied with recounting my experiences. There will always be traducers like Sisupala to challenge the divinity of an embodied divine Person! First, comes the story of Sri Aurobindo's marksmanship which I once told in the pages of the journal *Parichay*, fifteen years ago. It has since been retold in many languages, even in authoritative biographies of the Master. It was many years ago that Aurobindo had come to me in Thanā on a short holiday. A dark, dull, drizzly evening; we had nothing particular to do and were amusing ourselves with a little saloon rifle. My wife said to Aurobindo, "Come, Ghose Saheb, take a hand." He would not at first agree, giving as excuse that he had

never touched a gun and that he knew nothing about shooting. As we refused to let him off, he picked up the rifle at last. I tried to explain to him the technique of aiming over a V-sight. But he turned to my wife and said, "You stand by me, Lilavati, Charu is too hasty." Then he started firing, and after just one or two slight mistakes, got the target again and again. The target was the head of a match stick at about twelve feet! Fifteen years ago I said, by way of joke, "If realisation in Yoga does not come to such a man, will it come to bunglers like you and me!" I say the same thing even now.

Another time, when Aurobindo came to us at Thana, my brother-in-law, Subodh Mallik, was staying with us. We had a great time together. Aurobindo and Subodh became very friendly during their stay in Thana, and this friendship of theirs ripened into close association, when Subodh entered into political life a year later. At his insistence, Aurobindo accepted the direction of the National College and of the newly started daily paper, "Bande Mataram." During this period he lived mostly in Subodh's Wellington Square house — not only as an honoured guest, but practically as a member of the family. Our mother he addressed as mother and she addressed him as either Aurobindo or simply as Baba. It was indeed marvellous — a vastly learned man, a great political leader like him, dropping his formidable personality and becoming one with, another family, in love and affection! In the Calcutta house Aurobindo became to my wife, even more of a brother than he had been in Bombay. Ordinarily he was averse to accepting personal service. But it was by no means an uncommon sight to see Lilavati wiping the sweat and combing his head tenderly after his return from work, and he protesting, "But why? I have got no lice in my hair!" The ladies of the house cooking little things for him was a daily occurrence, both in Thana and in Calcutta. He never objected to that, as he was a connoisseur of good

food. But be it remembered that he was always a small eater. Let me relate a short tale: It was an evening in my Thana bungalow, when both Aurobindo and Subodh were staying with us. My wife asked, "Will you people have melon ice?" Aurobindo replied with enthusiasm, "Excellent idea! But let us have plenty of it." The Sherbat was duly made and put into the freezer. As it was going to take a little time to be ready, Subodh proposed a game of cards to pass the time. Aurobindo said, "Most certainly, only I do not now any of the games you people play. I used to play whist a little in England, as a boy." Subodh cried out, "All right, whist let it be." We started to play — Subodh and I against Aurobindo and my wife. Aurobindo said to his partner, "We are going to beat them hollow, Lilavati. But you must explain things, a bit, to me." He said, he remembered the names of the four suits and also that there were thirteen cards in each suit. That was about all. His partner told him that the objective was to take tricks and explained to him how this was to be done. Then began the game. It was very one-sided, for he managed to rope in most of the high cards and seemed to know, for certain, what cards each player held. Quite innocently, without an effort, he did all this and won game after game. After a little while, I threw my cards down on the table saying, "How do you expect us to play, O Tyagarajan! if you take the best cards yourselves, the whole time?" Why I called him Tyagarajan that evening, I don't recollect now, but he mentioned the word to Purani only a couple of years ago. I don't think I shall be wrong if I say that his card-playing was on a par with his rifle shooting, which I have already described. It was gramarye of some sort, as the medieval people called it. My wife said graciously, "All right, you quarrelsome people, we shall forego all we have won. Now, go and get ready for the ices." Her partner said, "We have certainly won by superior skill, and we give away our winnings out of sheer generosity,

Lilavati. Well, I shall get through my Ahnik and come back in fifteen minutes for my ices." But he did not return in fifteen minutes, nor even in half an hour. When about forty minutes had passed, the servant said, "The ice has set so beautifully, madam. In another ten minutes it would begin to go soft again." I said to Subodh, "Come, let us call him." We carried a couple of brass cups each and threw ourselves on his closed door. Subodh and I weighed full twenty seven stones, so my reader can imagine the racket we made. But it had no effect. We went back to my wife and reported that her guest must have fallen asleep. We had two fat helpings of that delicious melon ice. When we had finished, Aurobindo came along rubbing his eyes. We made profuse, but insincere, apologies for having taken our share of the ice before him. He smiled and said, "Greedy fellows! Never mind, Lilavati, give me my share. It has gone soft, you say? Well it could not have lost its sweetness." Then I asked, "While you were meditating, were you not upset by some big noise?" He replied glibly, "Big noise! No. But something seemed to disturb me for a moment, then I went off again. But I have enjoyed this Sherbat immensely, Lilavati." Rightly did I bestow the name of Tyagarajan on him, that evening!

Many stories have been told of Sri Aurobindo's wonderful memory in his old age — specially those that we have heard from Nirod in connection with his literary work. But his memory was astounding even when he was a comparatively young man. In 1906-7, sometimes, when he returned from his college he found us engaged in playing poker or dice. As he did not take any interest in these gambling games, he would pick up some book and go through it rapidly while waiting for his tea. We had noticed this, and had resolved to test him and find out if he really read through the whole book or merely glanced at a page, here and there. One day, he found a six-penny novel — utter trash — lying on the

divan, and plunged into it forthwith. He read the book rapidly and, at the end of half an hour or so, threw it down. Subodh was looking at him through the corner of one eye. He took up the book promptly and asked, "Have you really been through the whole book?" "Yes." "Can you repeat to us any portion of it?" "Yes." Subodh called out to me, "Now, Charu, for the viva voce examination." I opened the book at a certain page at random. It began this way: "The Man and I went out into the moonlit garden." I read the line and said, "Now go on, Chief." Well, with very little alteration he repeated the whole page. This is a more striking feat of memory than any that I have ever come across. Yogic power? I don't say so. But it is marvellous concentration!

It would be superfluous to narrate any more tales of this sort. For the average unprejudiced reader it should not be necessary. Who but an absolutely wooden headed man would say that the Master wrote "*The Life Divine*" and "*Savitri*" by the power of his intellect alone? His powers in his more youthful days were but forerunners of his later Yogic realisation. They were indications of his innate spiritual capacity. Otherwise, no ordinary man, who had never handled a gun, could suddenly display the kind of marksmanship that I have described. Nor could such a man take up casually a book of a hundred pages and in half an hour practically know it by heart. Nor could he, an absolute novice, play such a game of whist where he knew beforehand what cards each player held. All these things are certainly not logical according to our way of thinking. But they can all be explained by what he himself has called the "logic of the Infinite".

The course of Sri Aurobindo's life has undoubtedly been mysterious. He himself said in a letter that it has not been visible on the surface and therefore it has been beyond the ken of the ordinary man. Then again, he had always been, even in the days of his

political activity, averse to pushing himself forward. He had been ever inclined to work from behind other people. He said once, by way of joke, that it was the British Government who dragged him out into publicity.

When he was arrested the first time, for sedition, I was in Thana. Barin was staying with me. Suddenly a wire came to the effect that Aurobindo had been arrested for sedition and that he was disinclined to make any defence. I sent Barin back that very day with a strong letter that we must defend the case and that I was coming to Calcutta as soon as possible. Rabindranath published his famous poem, "Aurobindo, accept the salutation of Rabindra." There was a great commotion in the country. The main point in the case was, whether Aurobindo Ghose was the Editor of the *Bande Mataram*, or not. In the office we found the press copy of a letter written to some correspondent to the effect that "our editor, Aurobindo Babu, is out of town just now and that we shall send a reply to your letter as soon as he is back." As this press copy was most damaging to our case we destroyed it. Ultimately, the prosecution failed to prove that Aurobindo Babu was the editor, and the magistrate, Mr. Kingsford had to acquit him. A couple of days later, one afternoon we were celebrating the happy event very noisily — when a sepoy came and said, "Rabi Babu has come." We rushed out to the front door. The poet spread out his arms and held the Chief in a close embrace, saying with a tender smile, "You have deceived me, Aurobindo Babu." The latter replied, "Not for long, I assure you." Then the poet sat and talked with us for a while. I said to him, "We did not allow our friend to go to jail, Sir. There were one or two papers of a damaging kind, which we destroyed in good time. But, this is only the beginning! Your poem will be justified in the end." Manmohan, Sri Aurobindo's brother, laughed, "Sir, this man Charu, is always saying we are out to kill, not to offer

ourselves to the demon!”

In his now famous letters to his wife, Aurobindo made his relation with her perfectly clear. I did not know of these letters till they actually appeared in print. One day I had asked him in the course of conversation, “Chief, you knew that you were going to plunge into the vortex of revolutionary politics. Why did you marry? Don’t tell me if you don’t want to.” He thought for a moment and replied very slowly, “Well, Charu, it was like this. Just then I was very despondent and felt that I was destined to lead the life of a pedagogue. Why, then, should I not marry?” Aurobindo married, be it noted, in April 1901. And, in 1903, he initiated his Bhavani Mandir movement, and pushed it vigorously.

One afternoon, subsequently to Rabindranath’s visit to Aurobindo, above described, Bhupal Babu, Aurobindo’s father-in-law, came to see us in the Wellington Square house. The Chief had not as yet returned from his college. Bhupal Babu said to us, “Charu, Subodh, I have come to ask Aurobindo to come and dine with me this evening. My daughter, Mrinalini, has come to Calcutta to meet him, if possible. So I would like Aurobindo to stay the night in our house and return to you tomorrow morning. Do send him along.” We were all tremendously excited over this invitation. When Aurobindo came home about 5 p.m., he could see that something out of the common had occurred. We gave out a loud yell on seeing him and all spoke together. He laughed and said, “One at a time, please.” Then I said, “My dear fellow, this sort of gala occasion comes but once in a blue moon! Aurobindo is going to visit his spouse this evening. He said with a suppressed smile, “Yes! go on.” It was Subodh’s turn to speak. He said, “Bhupal Babu came to invite you. You are to dine with him this evening and spend the night in his house. It appears that Mrs. Ghose has come down to Calcutta expressly for the purpose of congratulating her

lord on his acquittal." Aurobindo said merely, "I see." Then my wife started, "There is nothing to see. Please get ready quickly and put on the clothes I have laid out for you. They have all been properly pleated and crinkled by Subodh's bearer." No reply from the other side; nothing but a shy twinkle in the eye. My wife, encouraged by the twinkle, went on, "And, look here, Ghose Sahib, Subodh's wife and I are weaving two beautiful garlands of Jasmine — one for you and one for our Didi. I shall instruct you about them, later on." The poor philosopher quietly capitulated. He had not a chance of speaking. After tea, he was hustled into the dressing room for being valeted by Subodh's bearer. He did not protest. After all, who was going to listen to him that evening, our great Chief though he was. When he came out, he looked gorgeous in his fine dress, but there was also a simple shy smile on his face. We had all been waiting to greet him. Lilavati stepped forward with the two garlands and said, "One of these you are going to put round Didi's neck and the other she is going to put round yours. Please don't forget." The Chief with a tender smile replied. "It shall be done, Lilavati." As he was getting into the carriage Subodh called out, "And, please don't come back till tomorrow morning." Turning to the Durwan he ordered. "Lock the gate at 10 p.m. Ghose Saheb is not coming back tonight."

Next morning, quite early, a servant came upstairs and said to Subodh, "Ghose Saheb wants to know, sir, if you are all coming down to tea." "Ghose Saheb? When did he come back?" "He returned about 11 p.m." We all trooped downstairs. There he sat in his arm-chair, quietly smiling to himself. We fired a volley of questions at him. He replied calmly, "Well, I had a superb dinner and returned here about 11 p.m. Lilavati, your instructions regarding the garlands were carried out to the letter." Lilavati asked plaintively, "But why did you come away so soon?" The Chief's

reply was, "I explained things to her and she allowed me to come away." I suppose these explanations were later on, embodied in the famous letters.

There are people who often ask, what happened to Mrinalini, spiritually. I shall quote but one sentence from Sri Aurobindo's letter to me dated 5-12-1944:

"I did not take my wife for initiation to Sri Saradeshwari Devi; I was given to understand that she was taken there by Sudhira Bose, Debabrata's sister. I heard of it a considerable time afterwards in Pondicherry. I was glad to know that she had found so great spiritual refuge, but I had no hand in bringing it about."

C.C.Dutt

("Sri Aurobindo Circle" Eighth Number, 1952)

## Charu Chandra Datta



Charu Chandra Datta (Dutt) (1877-1952), member of the I.C.S., appointed at first as magistrate and then as judge in Bombay. Sri Aurobindo met him in 1904 in Thane (Maharashtra). Charu Chandra joined the revolutionary party.

Charu Chandra had already, while in England during the period 1896-99, established contact with the Irish revolutionaries, and was a member of a group of Indians who had pledged themselves to work secretly for the liberation of their country. He continued his secret activities even after joining the Indian Civil Service.

Charu Chandra passed ICS examination in 1899 and was posted as District Judge and Magistrate in Bombay Presidency. He married Lilabati Basu Mallik, daughter of Hemchandra Basu Mallik and Bhubanmohini. They had daughter, Lilabati, and son Arindham Dutta.

“Once Sri Aurobindo came to Thana, a town in Gujarat, where I was posted. It was raining heavily on that day. As we could not stir out, we fell to target-shooting to beguile the time. My wife proposed that Sri Aurobindo should be given the rifle so that he might also have a try, but Sri Aurobindo refused, saying that he had never handled a rifle. But because we insisted, he agreed. We had only to show him how to hold the rifle and take aim. The target was the black, tiny head of a match stick, hung at a distance of ten or twelve feet. Aurobindo took aim, and, lo and behold! the very first shot flew the stick into the target, and the first hit was followed up by the second, and the second by the third! It took our breath away.

I remarked to my friends: «If such a man doesn't become a siddha (spiritually perfect), who would become — people like you and me?»” (Puranokatha-Upasanhara by Charu Chandra Datt.)

In 1906 he helped to reorganize Bande Mataram and form a joint-stock company for the paper. He was implicated in the Manicktolla Bomb Case, but no charges were brought against him.

After retiring in 1925 he stayed for some time at Santiniketan. In 1928 he retired from service and came back to Calcutta. In 1932, at the request of Rabindranath, he joined Visvabharati as Vice-President.

In 1940 joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, where he used to give lessons to the children in his room.



The Mother with Charu Chandra Dutt  
(Photo by Cartier Bresson 25th April 1950)