5. My Education at Home And at School

I was just five years old when my father initiated me into the tree R's by performing the ceremony called in those days, even amongst Hindus, as *maktab*, a Persian word, which had become thoroughly naturalised amongst the community to which my family belonged. This word was current amongst us by reason of the close association of our community with the Mussalmans. Such contact had existed between the Mussalmans and the members of my community for centuries, with the result that a number of institutions and customs of the Muslims had been adopted by the members of my community, just as a large number of customs and institutions of the Hindus had been adopted by the Muslims, as the result of the intimate contact between the two communities for centuries. The Sanskrit word now generally used amongst the Hindus, called *Vidya-arambh*, (which means precisely the same thing as *maktab*) was then practically unknown amongst us. On the day fixed for the performance of the ceremony, my house wore a festive appearance. Friends and relations had been invited in large numbers, and had come from even outside Arrah, and the local gentry were all assembled by noon, when the ceremony was to be performed. It began with the family priest, chanting, Sanskrit *slokas* which, or course, nobody understood in those days, except perhaps the few Pundits present on the occasion.

I am speaking of nearly seventy years from now, when the study of Sanskrit in Bihar, even amongst the literary classes to which my family belonged, had fallen into complete decadence. Even Hindi (the Hinduised form of Hindustani)-which is now so popular amongst Hindus-was then scarcely known in Bihar. The court and official language of the province of Bihar, was, broadly speaking, highly Persianised Hindustani (popularly known as Urdu), and it was a knowledge of it which was naturally acquired by those who aspired either to official position, or to the leadership of the Bar. At the same time traces of Hinduism had not completely disappeared from amongst even such Muslimised communities as the one to which my family belonged. Accordingly after the Muslim *maulvi* had caught hold of my hand, and made me write out, on a slate, the first few letters of the Perso-Arabic alphabet (in which Urdu is usually written), the senior-most of the Pandits present made me similarly write out the first five letters of the Deonagri alphabet, in which Sanskrit and Hindi are usually written and printed in Upper India.

To me, however, the most interesting part of the ceremony was not my having been made to scribble the characters of the two scripts, on a slate, as the distribution of the sweets which followed immediately after the conclusion of the ceremony. The two sweets which had been specially prepared in large quantity for the ceremony were called *batashas* and *illaichidanas* which were

cloyingly sweet to the taste, and as such most palatable to me, and my friends. It goes without saying that all the members of the family had been presented by my parents with new clothes, and those provided for me, were naturally the most expensive which my father's means could afford. The initiation ceremony, however, was not quite finished at the time it was performed, and part of it remained to be gone through the next day, when a teacher of English was called to make me go through a similar process of writing the Roman alphabet, as I had been made to do, the previous day, in the case of Urdu and Hindi scripts.

My father had accordingly to appoint three tutors to help me in my studies at home, one to teach English, another to teach Hindi, and a third one (a Muslim *maulvi*) to teach Persian and Urdu, along with a number of other boys, who all came to my house daily to take their lessons with me. It was this institution which was known as *maktab*, and had come in the wake of the spread of Muslim system of education in the country. It required one fairly well-to-do person in an area to engage the services of a maulvi to teach his son, or sons, Persian and Urdu at his house, but at which the boys of the neighbouring houses also would come and receive tuition on payment of such small fees as their poor parents could afford. This system had become thoroughly naturalised amongst those classes of Hindus also who were desirous of cultivating a knowledge of Persian and Urdu, but the changed conditions under the influence of the British system had made this very useful institution practically disappear from Upper India, at any rate in the towns, from amongst the Hindus.

After receiving education at home, for one year, in English, Urdu and Hindi, under my three tutors, I was considered sufficiently advanced to be admitted into the High School of my native town, a Government institution, known as the Zila School, i.e, the school for the whole district. Accordingly on a day, which was considered by my mother auspicious, my father took me with him to the head master of the Arrah Zila School for my admission as a scholar. The Arrah Zila School at that time (1877) had ten pre-matriculation classes. Ordinarily I should have taken my admission into the lowest class, the eleventh, but the result of my one year's study at home had qualified me better than the average student of my age, with the result that after examining me the head master congratulated my father on the progress I had made in my studies, and told him that he would admit me into the tenth class. And so, in February 1877, I began my school career as a scholar of the tenth class of the Arrah Zila School, where I studied for about ten years. My progress as a young scholar was satisfactory in the opinion of my tutors, and also of my father and his friends. Before I had been a month at school I had worked my way up to the group of the five or six students who occupied, in almost every subject, the highest position in the class.

I was promoted, from year to year, at the end of the annual examinations held by the school authorities, and I used to stand high up in the list of successful

candidates. Of course, all subjects were then taught to us through the medium of English, except the two languages, Hindi and Urdu, the study of which was then compulsory for all scholars, irrespective of their being Hindus or Muslims. This system had, unfortunately, long since been changed; and I believe, it has now been made optional with the student in Upper India to take only Hindi or Urdu, as he may like. The result of this change has been highly detrimental, since almost all the Hindu and Muslim boys now learn only Hindi or Urdu respectively. I am satisfied that as the result of the education that was imparted to me at school, for the first five or six years of my career as a scholar, I have been able to possess far better qualifications of coping with my work in various spheres of activities than it would otherwise have been possible for me to have done. The result of the present system of education in the languages of the country is, that although the spoken idiom is still more or less common to both the Hindus and the Muslims, there is a vast divergence in the written style of the two forms of Hindustani known as Hindi and Urdu respectively. The result has been highly detrimental to the growth and development of a common literature and a common culture.

In 1884, I was promoted to the fourth standard when bifurcation had to be made in the study of language, the student being called upon to take up, in place of the modern Indian languages, either Arabic or Persian, or Sanskrit. So far as Arabic was concerned the study of it had become dead in the Government schools even at that time, and scarcely even any Muslim student cared to take up Arabic; but Persian (or as it is now called Iranian) was then taken up not only by almost all the Muslim students but even by a fairly large number of Hindu students. Unfortunately, I was ill-advised, to take up Sanskrit Instead of Persian, under some kind of patriotic impulse. But I had to pay a heavy price for my wrong choice for a period of no less than sixteen months. The Calcutta University had directed that thereafter the academic year would extend from July to June, instead of, as till then, from January to December, as a result of which the academic session of that particular year lasted from January 1884 till April 1885, when the school closed for the long vacation.

The Head Pandit of the school who used to teach us Sanskrit was a native of Benares. He was reputed to be a good scholar of Sanskrit but he little understood, I fear, the art of teaching young boys, such a difficult and unfamiliar subject as Sanskrit. The result was that I completely lost ground in the Sanskrit class; while still retaining my position in the other subjects amongst the topmost boys of the class. I was relegated to the bottom of the class almost daily by the Head Pandit. That was bad enough in all conscience, but that was not all. The head Pandit, as it seemed to me then, took a malicious delight in humiliating me before the class, from day to day. The moment he arrived in the class, he would put some question to me, and on my failure to give him satisfactory answer, he would roll about his eyes in fine frenzy, and would shout

at the pitch of his voice: "Sachchidananda, go down to the bottom of the class, and stand up on the bench with your face towards the wall"!

This had become the daily routine. Nothing I could do would satisfy the Head Pandit, who was always bitter and sarcastic in his remarks about me. He would often say: "Why do you not join the Persian class instead of trying to learn Sanskrit, which your forefathers never learned."

These incidents embittered my life, and infuriated me not only against the head Pandit, but even against a study of Sanskrit itself. And while standing on the bench with my face towards the wall, I was all the time swearing hard at, and cursing impartially, both against the head Pandit and the study of Sanskrit. I bore my sufferings meekly and patiently, but swore eternal vengeance both against the Head Pandit and Sanskrit, and at last I succeeded in my effort. Of course I was declared to have failed in Sanskrit at the annual examination, but I had done so remarkably well in all the other subjects that the Head Master, differing from the Head Pandit, who insisted on my detention in the same class for another acaemic year (evidently with a view to improve my Sanskrit) promoted me to the next higher class. After my promotion, I told my father that I was so disgusted with Sanskrit as taught by the Head Pandit, that I would never be able to pass the matriculation examination unless I was allowed to appear in Persian instead of Sanskrit, and I appealed to him to exert his influence with the Head Master of the school to allow me to change Sanskrit for Persian.

This was by no means easy, as the rules then in force gave no discretion to the Head Master to permit such a change, and the matter required being reported, to the Inspector of schools, at Patna. Very fortunately for me, the relations between the Head Master and the Head Pandit were rather strained, and the Head Master forwarded to the Inspector my father's application with a strong recommendation that I should be allowed to take Persian for my further studies.

My Father's Friends and their Families

Before dealing with my educational career, at Patna, I would like to say something about my father's friends, and also the social relations that subsisted between the Hindus and Muslims during the eighties of the last century. As mentioned previously, my father long occupied the position of one of the leaders of the Arrah Bar, and as such almost all his friends were members of the legal profession. The most notable amongst them was Harbans Sahay, whom I have already mentioned, and who came into great prominence before his premature death, in 1885, at the age of forty-five. He was then the only English-knowing advocate practising in the District Courts at Arrah, who was a Bihari-the few others being Bengalis. As conditions changed in the country,

in general, and in the province of Bihar, in particular, the British Judges and Magistrates came to be more and more dependent on the assistance rendered to them by English-knowing lawyers. My father felt that it would be of advantage to the more efficient transaction of the legal work of the Dumraon estate, of which he was the chief Legal Adviser, if an English-knowing junior was associated with him. Accordingly, he suggested to the then Maharaja of Dumraon the association of Harbans Sahay as junior. Harbans Sahay had been for some years employed in the Judicial Service of Government as a Munsif (or Lower Grade Civil Judge) but he was a man of parts and drive, and he felt that he would do better at the Bar than in service. Accordingly, he resigned service under Government, and joined the Arrah Bar.

With the advantage of not only knowing English but possessing also a sound knowledge of law and procedure, Harbans Sahay soon got into a good practice on his own account, and before long came to occupy a position amongst front-rank lawyers. But it must be said to his credit that he never forgot his obligaton to my father, and till the last day of his life, he always showed respect to and reverence for my father, even when the latter had retired from practice due to advanced age, after having got Harbans Sahay promoted to the office of Chief legal Adviser, in his place. Harbans Sahay had a commanding practice, and whenever I used to go to his house to play with his sons, I found him always surrounded by a large number of clients. By 1882 he had come to occupy so prominent a position as a leading lawyer, in the whole district of Shahabad, that on the occasion of the visit of Sir Rivers Thomson (the then Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, and Orissa) to Arrah, it was Harbans Sahay who was selected by the District Officer as the most representative person to read out the address presented to Sir Rivers, on behalf of the people of the district, at the Darbar held in the Hall of the Zila School. The Lieutenant-Governor was so pleased with him that immediately after his return to Calcutta, he appointed him, on the happening of the first vacancy, a member of the Bengal Legislative Council. The system of election to the Legislature did not obtain at the time, and there were but a few nominations which could then be made of non-officials. Harbans Sahay was thus the first Bihari to be honoured with such a distinction. His nomination as a Legislative Councillor-which carried with it the honorific of "The Hon'ble"-gave him a still higher position in public life, and raised him to the highest status to which a non-official could aspire at that time. Thereafter, until his sudden death at Patna, in 1885, it was Harbans Sahay, who was most prominent Bihari not only in the district of Shahabad, but in the province of Bihar.

Another great friend of my father's was Jai Prakash Lall, the then manager of the Dumraon estate, who also, in course of time, came into great prominence, in a different sphere of activities. He had started his career as a tutor to the son of the then Maharaja of Dumraon. Being a man of parts and steady habits,

he slowly worked his way up from the tutorship of the young proprietor of the estate, to the managership of his estate. In course of time he not only received the title of "Rai Bahadur", but was later the recipient of the Insignia of Companionship of the Order of the Indian Empire. As a Manager of the estate (one of the largest in Bihar, with a gross income of a hundred thousand pounds) he achieved great distinction, and was nominated, after the death of Harbans Sahay, as his successor to the Provincial Legislative Council. He became a great favourite with Government, who settled with him a large estate, in Upper Burma, after its annexation, in 1886, which is in the possession of his only son Rai Bahadur Harihar Prasad Singh. He died in 1897, after having acted with the Maharani as one of the Executors of the Dumraon estate, under the terms of the will of Maharaja Sir, Radha Prasad Singh. The Burma Estate he acquired was developed successfully by his son, mentioned above, who became involved in a heavy and sensational litigation for its possession, at the instance of Maharaja Sir Keshav Prasad Singh, who claimed that estate, on various legal grounds, as an integral part of the Dumraon estate. The district Judge of Shahabad (a British member of the Indian Civil Service) decided the case in favour of the plaintiff (Maharaja).

On appeal to the Patna High Court, against the decree and order of the District Judge, a full bench of three Judges, composed of the then Chief Justice, Sir Dawson Miller, and two Civilian puisne Judges (one British and one Indian allowed the appeal, and reversed the decree and order of the District Judge. The Maharaja then appealed (against the decree of reversal by the Patna High Court) to the Privy Council. Both parties to the appeal engaged so many eminent lawyers, for the hearing in the Privy Council, that Reuters sent a special message to India, at the time of the appeal being heard, that to provide accommodation for all the lawyers engaged by both sides, their Lordships had to remove from their room, for the first time in the history of the Privy Council, all the book-cases, and much of the other furniture, to be able to provide the large number of seats required. The hearing of the appeal lasted for weeks, but the case was ultimately compromised, to the disappointment of many engaged in the case. I was the principal witness on behalf of the defendant on perhaps the most important issue in the case, in the trial court, an incident in my career to which I shall refer later, at some length, as it is of great interest.

The only other lawyer friend of my father's whom I shall mention was a Muslim gentleman of the highest position and distinction, Quazi Zahural Huq. He was older than my father, and had become a great friend of his since my father removed from Benares to Arrah in 1865. So great was their friendship that the Quazi Saheb used to meet my father almost daily, and my father also used to visit him frequently. It was not customary in those days, as it is now, for educated Hindus and Muslims to dine together, and I do not remember to have ever seen my father and the Quazi Saheb sharing a meal together. But

that made absolutely no difference to their true and genuine friendship. They were, in spite of their not having taken a meal together, the best and closest of friends. Theirs was not a friendship of stomachs but of hearts. They were linked together not only in their intellectual pursuits, but also in their spiritual convictions - my father as a Vedantist and the Quazi Saheb as a Sufi - and so shared each other's ideals and aspirations, and also joys and sorrows. In fact, their friendship was so genuine and sincere that it could be rightly described in the words that Shakespeare had put into the mouth of Hamlet in his advice to the players:-

"The friends thou hast and their adoption tried,
Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel."

Of the two high officials, who were great friends of my father's, one was Syed Wahiduddin, a member of the Provincial Judicial Service, and the other, Syed Waris Ali, a member of the Provincial Executive Service. In those days transfers of officials-specially of Indians-were made at long intervals, and one generally posted to a district headquarters could reasonable look forward to stay there for many years, ranging from ten to fifteen. Accordingly both these officers stayed at Arrah for quite a long time an age, so to say. Both were recipients of the title of "Khan Bahadur" in recognition of their work by Government. Wahiduddin was a Bihari, while Waris Ali was technically a non-Bihari, as will appear in the sequel. Wahiduddin was connected by marriage with a well-known family at Neora, a village near the Dinapore railway station, on the East Indian Railway-some residents of which village long played a prominent part in the intellectual and political history of modern Bihar. Wahiduddin died at the advanced age of ninety, on my return from England after call to the Bar, in 1893. While stationed at Arrah, he used to come frequently to my house, when I was a student at school.

Of the four sons of Wahiduddin the two most prominent were ("Nawab, Shamshul Ulema") Imdad Imam, and ("Khan Bahadur") Fazal Imam. The latter died comparatively young in 1899. He was a great social figure, at Patna, for about a quarter of a century, and occupied during that period the highest position in the civic life of the capital of Bihar, as Vice-Chairman of the Municipality. He was also nominated, by the Lieutenant-Governor of the province, a member of the "Bengal Legislative Council"-as the Legislature of the Lower Provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa was then popularly designated, in common parlance. But apart from his public activities, he was the uncrowned king of the social life of Patna. Scarcely a week passed when no important social function was held at his house - a garden party today, a tea party tomorrow, and a dinner party the next evening. He was popular with all classes and sections of the people, and his premature death at the age of forty-six was mourned throughout the province of Bihar.

"Nawab" Imdad Imam, the eldest son of Wahiduddin, who died at the advanced age of eighty-six, was born in 1850 and passed away in 1936. He was the most versatile man in Bihar that I came across. He had taken in early youth to the profession of law, but after trying his luck at it for a couple of years, he forsook it for ever; and applied his great talents to other pursuits in which he distinguished himself. He was a most eminent physician, and though he had not taken a degree in medical science, he practised successfully various systems of medicine-Ayurvedic (Indian), Unani (Ionian or Arab-Greek), and Homeopathy, but he had no faith in Allopathy. He was a scholar of English, Arabic, Persian, Urdu and Hindi, He wrote excellent verses not only in Urdu but also in Persian. He wrote a number of prose works of great utility in Urdu, and also some in English. In fact, for nearly half a century he represented the culture of Bihar at its best. He was the father of Sir Ali Imam[47] and Mr. Hasan Imam[48], each of whom had a highly distinguished career-the former as a publicman, advocate, Law Member of the Government of India (1910-15), and afterwards as the President of the Executive Council of His Exalted Highness the Nizam of Hyderabad; while Mr. Hasan Imam proved a capable and independent Judge of the Calcutta High Court for some years, and was afterwards the acknowledged leader of the Patna High CourtBar. Khan Bahadur Wahiduddin used to bring frequently to my father's house at Arrah, both his (grand)-sons (sic), and according to the then prevailing custom in Bihar I used to call them "uncle".

Wahiduddin, who-as stated above-was married at the village, Neora, had settled down there, and consequently his descendants were know as the members of "Neora family". But the particular family into which he was married was a

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47 Imam, Syed Ali (1869-1931); belonged to a famous Shia family Neora, Patna; who was among the first Indians and perhaps the first 'Bihari' to receive English education; educated at Arrah and Patna; went to england, 1887; called to the Bar, 1890; started practice at Calcutta High Court, 1890; Trustee M.A.O. College, Aligarh, 1908; President, All-India Muslim League Session, Amritsar, 1908; fellow, Calcutta University 1909-12; member, Bengal Legislative Council 1910-15; Vice-President, All India Muslim League Session, Delhi 1910 and Lucknow, 1916; resumed practice at Patna High Court, 1916; Judge, Patna High Court, 1917; member, Governor's executive Council, Bihar and Orissa, 1918-19; First President of Executive Council, Hyderabad State, 1919, resigned 1923; member, All Parties Conference Committee, 1928; took part in the Civil Disobedience Movement, 1930-31; President, Swadeshi league of Patna, 1930 and Nationalist Muslim Conference, Lucknow, 1931.

48 Imam, Syed Hasan (1871-1933); younger brother of Syed Ali Imam; educated at Arrah and Patna; went to England 1889; called to the Bar, 1892; practised at Patna and Calcutta High Courts; Judge, Calcutta High Court, 1912-16; resumed practice at Patna High Court, 1916; Joined the Congress, 1908; President, Bihar Provincial Congress Committee, 1909; President, Bihar Student's Conference, Gaya, 1909; opposed to the separate electorates for Muslims, Allahabad Congress, 1910; took active part in the Home Rule Movement, 1916 and in the Rowlatt Satyagraha, 1919; President, Bihar Provincial Conference, 1917 and demanded the release of Mrs. Annie Besant; President, special Congress sessionBombay, 1918; led the Muslim deputation to England for revision of Treaty of Serves with Turkey; worked for Hindu-Muslim unity; led the procession at Patna for boycott of the Simon Commission, 1928; actively participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement, 1930-31; Secretary, Swadeshi League, 1930.

distinguished one. His brothers-in-law (his wife's brothers) were prominent in Bihar for quite a long time. The elder one (Khan Bahadur) Syed Nasiruddin, a member of the Provincial Executive Service, rose to be the Secretary of the Board of Revenue of the Lower Provinces. Subsequently he went to Bhopal as the Prime Minister of that State, and was awarded at the Darbar held at Delhi, in December 1911, by King-Emperor George V, the Insignia of the Companionship of the Exalted Order of the Indian Empire. He was a highly successful administrator. Syed Nasiruddin's younger brother, Syed Sharfuddin[49], was even more successful. He was a member of the English Bar, and enjoyed, for years, an extensive practice throughout the Province. He was the first Bihari to be elevated to the bench of the Calcutta High Court, in 1907, and on attaining the age of sixty in that court, he was given a year's extension, and was brought over as a Judge of the Patna High Court, on its establishment in1916. The Neora family had given as many as four Judges to the Calcutta and the Patna High Courts-Mr. Syed Sharfuddin, Sir Ali Imam (who sat on the Bench for a short time after his retirement from the Law membership of the Government of India) Mr. Hasan Imam, and Mr. Jafar Imam, who is the third son of Sir Ali Imam, and was elevated to the bench of the Patna High Court in 1943. The family thus showed remarkable legal talents, and I do not know of any other, within my long experience, which had provided as many as four Judges to two High Courts in the Country. This is, indeed, a unique record.

Sharfuddin, though still remembered as a skilful advocate was not regarded as a great judge, and he had come to be known for many years before his retirement, as a sleeping partner, from the fact that he often (like that renowned Judge, Mr Justice Stareleigh, who tried the famous case of *Bardell vs. Pickwick*[50]) conveyed to the Bar that he heard arguments most carefully and pondered over them most thoughtfully with his eyes closed! This habit of his led him sometimes into *contretemps* of no mean order. Of many such incidents, which I can recall, I shall record but one. Sir Rash Behary Ghose came to appear in the Patna High Court in an important second appeal, on behalf of the respondents,

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[49] Sharfuddin, Syed Mohammad (1856-1921); belonged to the famous Shia family of Neora; educated at Patna and London; called to the Bar from Middle Temple in 1880; on his return to India set up practice first at Chapra and later at Patna and then at Calcutta High Court; associated with the Congress since its inception in 1885; attended the second session of the Congress at Calcutta in 1886; contrary to yed Ahmad Khan, he urged the Muslims to join the Congress; elected Vice-Chairman, Patna District Board for three times; took active part in the agitations for creation of separate province of Bihar and Orissa; member, Muslim deputation to Lord Minto in 1906 at Shimla; presided over the All India Mohammadan Educational Conference, 1906 at Dacca; apponted Additional Judge, Calcutta High Court, 1907; became first Bihari judge in 1908 and served the Calcutta High Court till March 1916; Judge, Patna High Court, 1916-19; appointed member of the Executive Council, December 1919.

[50] This is a fictional legal case from the famous novelist Charles Dickens' work, The Pickwick Papers. Sachchidanand Sinha is making a humorous analogy on Justice Sharfuddin's "fictional" diligence.

in which I appeared for the appellants. Just as I began to open the case, Mr. Justice Sharfuddin fell asleep. He slept right through my arguments, and also Sir Rash Behary's-which lasted over a couple of hours. But he woke up fully refreshed, whilst I was replying. When I sat down the Chief Justice (Sir Edward Chamier) turned to the stenographer to deliver the judgment of the Court. Just then Mr. Justice Sharfuddin sweetly interposed:-"But we have not heard Sir Rash Bahary for the respondents" Sir Edward-a great wit-as sweetly said:-"Sir Rash Behary has left his case to the Court to decide as we think we should." Well, then it does not matter, commented Mr. Justice Sharfuddin-amidst the laughter of the whole court, but he never knew what the laughter was about!

Another great friend of my father's, who also was a Muslim was Syed Waris Ali, who was a senior member of the Provincial Executive Service. My father was fond of recalling and telling me of his virtues, even years after his death. Waris Ali-who also had received the little of Khan Bahadur-was the elder brother of the Right Hon'able Dr. Syed Ameer Ali, long a Judge of the Calcutta High Court, and afterwards the first Indian to sit for many years as a member of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. He died, in London, at the age of eighty, in 1928. During my visits to England, I used to call on him, and knowing as he did of my father's intimate relations with his elder brother, he always welcomed me. He cherished in high esteem and regard the memory of his brother, as evidenced by his having dedicated to "Syed Waris Ali of Arrah" the first edition of his famous book, the *Spirit of Islam*, published, in 1873, in London.[51] I had known Syed Ameer Ali, since 1893, when (on my return from England after my call to the bar) I went down to Calcutta to be enrolled as an Advocate in the High Court. He was then a Judge of the Calcutta High Court. He told me of his frequent visits to Arrah, while his elder brother was posted there as a Deputy Magistrate and Collector, and of his visits to my father in his brother's company. He also told me a good deal about his family, and his early career at the Bar, and of his struggles before he attained success in the profession. I learnt from him that his family hailed from Lucknow. His father had, by his first marriage a son-Syed Waris Ali, who after having served long in Bihar, particularly at Arrah, settled down there,, until he came to be known as "Syed Waris Ali of Arrah", where his descendants are still living.

Later, Syed Waris Ali's father emigrated to Orissa and married, at Cuttack, and it was there that Syed Ameer Ali, was born, in 1849. The family then settled down in Calcutta, and at Hooghly, that Ameer Ali was educated, and took the M.A. degree of the Calcutta University before he sailed for London, where he was called to the Bar, in 1873, by the Hon'ble Society of the Inner Temple, being the first Muslim Barrister in the whole of India. Later, during a visit to England, Syed Ameer Ali got engaged to Miss Konstam (an English-women of Jewish

[51] Syed Ameer Ali, The Spirit of Islam: A History of the Evolution and Ideals of Islam, London: Christophers, 1922 (revised edition).

persuasion), and after his marriage with her, they settled down in Calcutta, where Syed Ameer Ali practised, and held for some time the post of a Presidency Magistrate, until in the early nineties of the last century he was elevated to the Bench of the High Court. Mr. Ameer Ali's Brother-in-law, Mr. Konstam, was a member of the Indian Civil Service and was posted as Subdivisional Magistrate in North Bihar. In that capacity he was trying a number of villagers who were charged by a British manager of an Indigo concern with having committed a riot. The complainant saw nothing wrong in writing a private letter to Mr. Konstam suggesting that the accused being desperate characters, who had the hardihood to attack a British planter's factory, the arm of law should lay them by their heels, and inflict upon them condign punishment. Mr. Konstam-who had been addressed, in that letter as "My Dear Konstam" by the planter- carelessly left it on his office table, and his court clerk brought about a hornet's nest about the poor Magistrate's ears by quietly placing that letter on the file of the case, where it was discovered by the petitioners' counsel in the Calcutta High Court. There was then a tremendous uproar from the Bench, the earth reeled, and the Gothic cathedral-shaped Temple of Justice felt shaken to the very ground. The petitioners were acquitted immediately, as the result of the "My Dear Konstam", letter. It is still the favourite phrase, in regard to all judicial vagaries, of the nationalist journalists in India.'

Of the two sons of Syed Ameer Ali, the elder one passed out into the Indian Civil Service, was posted to the United Provinces, rose to be a District and Sessions Judge, retired early on pension, and had settled since in London. He appeared, in 1933, before the Joint Parliamentary Committee on the Hoare India Bill, to claim for the sons of an Indian father and a foreign mother the legal status of an Indian, as opposed to that of an "Anglo-Indian", in the new sense of the term, which view was, I believe, accepted by the Committee. Since then he had lived in retirement, to emerge occasionally as the writer of a "Letter to the Editor", in *The Times*, in which (forgetting his Indian nationality) he had indulged in more or less acrimonious criticisms of Indian nationalists. Syed Ameer Ali's second son (Torick) followed in his father's footsteps, and was called to the Bar. He had been a Judge of the Calcutta High Court for some years, and had risen to be, more than once, the Acting Chief Justice. If, in the fullness of time, he is made the permanent Chief Justice, he will have succeeded in capturing his father's seat on the Bench, just as did Mr. Justice Lalit Mohan Banerjee, when he was elevated to the Bench of the Allahabad High Court, of which his father, Sir Pramada Charan Banerjee, had been a very distinguished judge.

Before concluding this chapter, I may mention one important aspect of life at that time, which had since ceased to exist, due to inevitable causes which were bound to be operative in later days. I refer to the cultural unity, which then existed between the educated Hindus and Muslims, by reason of their possessing

a knowledge of Persian. Though correspondence, and transaction of business in courts and offices, had ceased, since 1838, to be conducted in Persian, when it was formally abolished by Government, nevertheless that highly polished and refined language long retained a dominant influence on cultural life in Upper India. The study and influence of Sanskrit had long since fallen into decadence; modern Sanskritzed Hindi had not been developed by then, and Urdu alone held the field. Those educated in Persian often talked to their friends in that language, as we do now in English. My father not unoften talked to his friends in Persian. I myself found it easier to pass my matriculation in Persian than in Sanskrit, which I abandoned. But Persian had long since became unknown in Upper India, except amongst a handful of schoolmasters and college professors.

End of my school career at Arrah

The year 1887 saw the celebration of the Golden Jubilee of Queen Empress Victoria. It was an occasion for great festivities all over the country, not only amongst the adults, but perhaps even more so amongst the students in the country. I was at that time in the pre-matriculation class, and having washed my stigma as an incompetent scholar in Sanskrit, and built up my reputations as a good student of Persian, I was justly regarded as one of the intellectuals in the school. The celebration of the Jubilee in the Arrah Zila School was a great function, consisting of meetings, dramatic shows, sports of various kinds, feasts, festivities, and other things allied thereto. Some of the students, including myself, were also given prominent seats in the local Durbar held by the District Magistrate, over which he himself presided. One of the items at this Durbar was recitation in English, Hindi and Urdu by the students of the school. The most prominent place in it was assigned to me, since I was credited with possessing faultless pronunciation in English. The two passages given to me for reciting, were the orations of Brutus, and of Mark Antony, from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. I was awarded special prizes for elocution for each of these two recitations. In fact, ever since I had been promoted to the fourth standard, I was called upon to recite poems at almost all prize distributions of the school and other similar functions, mostly in famous dialogues like *Alexander and the Robber*.[52]

In 1882 when the then Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa, Sir Rivers Thompson, visited the school, I was required to recite before him a poem specially composed for the occasion by the Additional Head Master of the school, who hailed from Bengal, and was a distinguished graduate of

[52] This is probably a textbook reference from his times. There are historical/historical-fictional accounts of Alexander's encounters in India in the popular imagination represented in literature and also films.

the Calcutta University. He affected poetry, and was highly proud of his poetic talents and achievements. I remember now only one single sentence from this great poetical effort of his. It was to the effect: "Take Rivers this poor song of mine". Rivers took it as a poor effort in English poetical composition, and though he exercised great patience in listening to my recitation of this long poem, I felt that it was a failure, not because of anything wanting in me, but in the poet's imagination and fancy.

At the Matriculation examination held by the Calcutta University in that particular year (1887), the percentage of students who had passed was very high, somewhere between seventy-five to eighty per cent, and it was a standing joke amongst us that they had all been allowed grace marks in celebration of the Queen's Jubilee. One of those who had matriculated that year was Ali Imam-afterwards Sir Ali Imam, Law Member of the Government of India from 1910 to 1915, and a distinguished leader not only of Bihar, but of the public life of the country. He did not, however, like the insinuation that he had passed the examination in the first division, not because of any merit of his own, but because of a concession made in connection with the Jubilee Celebration. I remember when I once chaffed him about it, he exercised an elder brother's right to box my ears. At the end of the annual examination, I was promoted to the matriculation class, having topped the list of the successful scholars of that year. I looked forward to pursue my studies peacefully under the guidance of the Head Master who was very kind and good to all of us, and particularly (as I felt) to me, but Fates had willed otherwise. As soon as the school reopened after the long vacation, the Head Master was transferred to another school, and we had to deal with his successor, with whom our troubles began from the very first day.

The new Head Master was reputed to be what is known in India as a "strong" man, who would stand no nonsense either on the part of his subordinates, or of students. At first this rumour, which reached us even before his arrival, alarmed us, but we thought we would wait and see how we fared at his hands. But the very day he came to teach us, he showed his teeth both literally and metaphorically. His two protruding teeth gave his face and feature an ugly appearance; and instead of speaking to us nicely he snarled at some of the students who put some questions to him. Before the class was over, he expressed his conviction that we were all incompetent and worthless. But that was not all; he called upon three students on the ground of their alleged misbehaviour to stand up on the bench, all this cut us to the quick. Our impression was that matriculation class students had a right to be treated on a better footing than the students of the lower classes. Accordingly we resented the treatment meted out to us. After the school hours were over a large number of students of the matriculation class not to confer with one another to settle the line of action to be adopted, if the Head Master persisted in his ill-treatment of us; but we first

decided to make a written representation to him on the subject which I and two others were asked to prepare.

Accordingly, we drafted a petition what would now be regarded by the students of today as a studiously moderate document. This was agreed to, and we three were asked to present it to the Head Master which we did. On receiving our representation he flew into fury, gnashed his teeth, and shouted at us at the pitch of his voice to the following effect: "Oh! You little rascals! So you are going to be the ring-leaders of a conspiracy against me; wait till I teach you a lesson which I shall do as soon I come to take your class today." This was enough. We left him in disgust and despair. He came into the class not long after, and instead of teaching us he addressed a long discourse on good breading and good manners, and threatened to rusticate us all (the whole class), unless we offered him an unconditional apology within twenty-four hours. Our indignation at his ill-treatment knew no bounds. As soon as he was gone, we all struck as if impelled by a common impulse. We all felt that far from our being called upon to apologise to the Head Master for having made a representation to him in the mildest terms, it is he who should have apologised to us, and so there began a tug-of-war which lasted for more than six months, and as a result of it, all teaching was suspended in the matriculation class.

We were a hundred strong belonging to various classes and communities, but we were all united on the point that we should receive better treatment than had been meted out to us. There remained but a few months for the University Examination, and we had done no work as the result of our almost daily warfare with the Head Master. We used to meet frequently to plan our campaign, and at last we felt that we should bring the matters to a head. We decided accordingly to bring the matter to the notice of our parents or guardians. I broached the matter to my father. He was diffident about our taking any drastic step, but I reasoned with him, and brought him round to see the Head Master personally, and to place before him an application asking for a transfer certificate to enable me to join another school. The Head Master spoke sharply to my father, called me a mischievous little fellow, and some other equally good names, and refused to pass any orders on the application. My father said to him that the Head Master's refusal to comply with my father's application on my behalf was rather unfair, and he would report the matter to the Inspector of Schools. This made the Head Master angrier still, and he told my father to do his worst.

As the result of this attitude on the part of the Head Master towards my father, the parents or guardians of almost all the other students presented similar applications to the Head Master on the following day, asking for transfer certificate for their sons or wards to enable them to secure admission in some other schools. The Head Master now found himself in fix; he felt that he had gone too far. He came to Patna and put before the Inspector of Schools his own version of the whole affair, with a view to poison the latter's ears. The

following day he returned and announced to us that Mr. Pope, the Inspector of Schools, would be shortly coming to Arrah to examine us. On learning this, the parents and guardians of the students met together to discuss the situation, and to make a joint representation to the Inspector on his arrival, against the Head Master and his treatment of us. They assembled on the following day in the verandah of the school, but the Head Master did not give them permission to stay there, and so they all had to walk out of the school compound and stay outside the gate. When Mr. Pope arrived, he asked them why they were there, and on being informed that they were the guardians of the students, he asked them to come and wait for him in the school library, which they did. The Head Master then ushered in the redoubtable Inspector, who seemed to us a man of great importance.

We had heard that Mr. Pope was a scholar of the Balliol College at the Oxford University, and also a fine speaker, which certainly he proved to be. He addressed us for more than two hours, and certainly proved himself to be an eloquent speaker. It was the first time in my life that I had heard an Englishman speaking at such length, and with such wonderful felicity. He employed every art and artifice of a trained speaker now threatening, now coaxing and cajoling, now appealing to us. In fact, be left nothing undone to get us to agree to continue our studies in the Arrah School. But we had suffered much and long, the iron had entered our soul, and so we remained adamant, and not one single student was at all influenced by Mr. Pope's eloquent appeal. The next day the Head Master passed a general order refusing to grant a transfer certificate to any of the students, as a result of which all of us left the school, and never went back to the class again. From that time onwards, until another Matriculation class was formed in the next academic year, there was no teaching in the Matriculation class of Zila School at Arrah. We scattered about, and joined different schools, at various other places. I came immediately to Patna, and took my admission in a famous school at that time, which is still not only in existence, but is flourishing, called T. K. Ghosh's Academy. Thus ended my career as a student of the Zila School, at Arrah, my native town; and a new chapter opened in my life with my taking admission into T. K. Ghosh's Academy at Patna, when I was nearing the completion of sixteenth year.

Several decades had passed since the happening of the incidents recorded above. Time had brought about many healthy changes in the relations between the students in our schools and their teachers. Many Government, schools have now well-organised hostels attached to them; great attention is now paid by the school authorities-especially in Government schools - to physical culture, the standard of efficiency of the staff had also been appreciably raised; and, on the whole, the general conditions in our schools are now so much better compared to what they were in the eighties of the last century, when I was studying in the Zila School, at Arrah. But nevertheless much remains to be done before

there would come to obtain in our schools that high cultural standard, which we still associate in our mind with the great institutions at Eton, Harrow, and Winchester. In recent years a few schools have been established by patriotic Indians, or enterprising Indian educationists, where educations is imparted to the children to well to do classes on lines similar to those which obtain in some of the famous schools in Britain; but their number can still be counted at one's fingers end. Nevertheless our schools are now better run than when I was a school student.

My School Career at Patna

I took my admission into T. K. Ghosh's Academy, at Patna, in October 1886. This institution had been founded, in 1882, by an enterprising Bengali educationist, whose name it still bears, but from sometime before I joined it, it was under the control of Baldeva Palit, a wealthy Bengali gentleman settled at Patna, who was interested in the spread of English education. It had a good staff of teachers, and it was, therefore popular with the students and their parents and guardians. At the time I was admitted into the school, Baldeva Palit had practically retired from its direct management, due to advanced age, and its control had devolved on his son, Jadunath Palit, who was running it efficiently. The Head Master of the school, at that time, was Gopal Chandra Bose, who was a well-known scholar of English, having headed the list of successful candidates at the Master of Art Examination of the Calcutta University. The other teachers on the staff were also competent and experienced persons.

The trouble, however, with us, who had joined the school without transfer certificates, was that we could not be allowed to appear at the matriculation examinations without the special permission of the Inspector of Schools. Now this officer's authority having been openly defied nay, flouted-by us not only was he not willing to allow us to be admitted into another school, but had moved Sir Alfred Croft-the Director of Public Instruction in the Lower Provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa at that time for an order of rustication against all the students of the Arrah Zila School, who had joined other institutions without taking the transfer certificate. The Director, knowing nothing of the matter, and acting only upon the statements contained in the Inspector's report, had passed an order of rustication against all of us-nearly one hundred students-who had joined other schools without having obtained a transfer certificate.

But Jadunath Palit, the managing proprietor of the Academy, was a man of considerable strength of character, and also possessed great influence in high official circles, and he took up our cause in right earnest, both in our interest and in his own. His own interest was obviously bound up with ours. He knew that once the order of rustication against us was cancelled by the director, on

his representation of our case, his institution would naturally come to acquire a tremendous reputation, particularly amongst the students throughout the Lower Provinces. Accordingly he deputed the Head Master to Calcutta to canvass individually each member of the Calcutta University Senate, and Syndicate. Before going to Calcutta on this errand, the Head Master prepared, and got printed for circulation, a pamphlet containing all the facts and circumstances in support of our case, from the time that the new Head Master of the Arra Zila School had arrived until the date of the order of rustication, and containing the details which have been set forth by me. But he was fighting for us against desperate odds. On the one hand, there were ranged against him not only the Head Master of the Arrah school, but the redoubtable Mr. Pope, the Inspector of Schools, and also Sir Alfred Croft, the Director of Public Instruction-whose order was sought to be impeached, on the other hand, there was behind him the support of Jadunath Palit working incessantly from Patna, encouraging him with not only advice but also with ample funds.

Palit's efforts, ably seconded by our Head Master who was approaching almost daily every Senator and Syndic of the Calcutta University bore fruit at last. The latter succeeded, by means of his strenuous effort, in securing the support of more than half the number of the members of the Senate, and almost all the Indian non-official members of the Syndicate, with the result that it came to be regarded as more or less a political question; a question between Government officials and non-officials. The Syndics and the Senators who had been persuaded to befriend our cause waited in deputation upon Sir Alfred Croft, and discussed with him our case at considerable length. They went the length of telling him that if the order of rustication passed by the Inspector was not revoked by him, they would table a resolution on the subject for discussion at the next meeting of the Syndicate, and later at the Senate itself. Sir Alfred Croft was evidently impressed with the earnestness displayed by such a large number of Syndics and Senators. He took time to consider what he should do, and to the surprise of everyone concerned in the affair, he cancelled the very next day his order of rustication, substituting for it that of a fine of ten rupees to be paid by each of the students who had left the Arrah Zila school without a transfer certificate.

Our Head Master, who was staying all the time in Calcutta, sent a long telegram to Jadunath Palit, who communicated it immediately to the Additional Head Master, who was in charge of the school, in the absence of the Head Master. The news of the cancellation of the rustication order spread like wild fire not only in the school, but throughout the length and breadth of Patna, as it had become a matter of considerable public interest. All the students of the Matriculation class of the Academy held a meeting to congratulate the rusticatees on the cancellation of the rustication order. But while all this was highly gratifying to us, the difficulty we were faced with was that but three weeks

remained for the test examination; and we had spent all our time and energy in fighting out our case, but had not touched our books for several months! There was now no time to lose, and all of us applied ourselves diligently to our studies, but it was obviously impossible to do all the text-books, in the various subjects, during the short interval of three weeks at our disposal.

I, therefore, decided to apply myself to the study of only such subjects (as for instance Mathematics) in which I was deficient, and not to English in which I was regarded as fairly proficient. At the test examination I could not answer even one single question in the paper on grammar and composition, except the last question which gave us the choice of writing an essay on any one of the four subjects mentioned in it. The last of these four was "A Moonlight Night", and I let myself go on it, instead of attempting to answer any other question. I devoted all the three hours at my disposal to writing an essay on a moon-light night. I found later that I was wise in my decision. The Head Master, who examined my paper told me that when he found that I had answered no question, but only written an essay, hi first impulse was to declare me having failed in English. But he said, that as he read my essay further and further he was highly impressed with it, and gave me full marks in it, with the result that, with the marks secured by me in other subjects, I was declared to have passed fairly creditably in the test examination, and was sent up for the matriculation examination of the Calcutta University to be held in March, 1888. I worked very hard during the period of two months that remained between the test and the University examination. Not having studied as well as I should have done, I never expected to pass in the first division, but I thought I might succeed in the third division. My calculation turned out wrong. I was attending a wedding, at a place in North Bihar, in May 1888, when a telegram was received from Calcutta, intimating that the Matriculation results had been declared, and that I had passed in the second division! Thus ended my school career, if not gloriously, at any rate not quite ingloriously. I felt elated at my success, since it would enable me to call myself "an under-graduate". And thus another chapter of my life was to open with my taking admission in the first year class of the Patna College in July, 1888.

Though I passed in the second division, for reasons set forth above, my knowledge of English, and my general proficiency, were well above the average that obtained amongst matriculated students; while my general knowledge-especially of Indian public affairs was of a much higher standard than that of my fellow-students. As the result of my reading a number of newspapers and journals, ever since my father had put me in the way, I had come to take considerable interest in the study of public questions. My imagination had also been fired by Indian nationalism, ever since I had read the reports of the proceedings of the first session of the National Congress-held at Bombay, in 1885-and of the two annual sessions that had followed it, at Calcutta and Madras, respec-

tively. I had developed into an omnivorous reader alike of inspirational and informative literature- instead of limiting my reading only to the text-books prescribed by the University for the Matriculation examination. Also, I read all the books I used to get each year as prizes for standing high at the annual examinations; and besides them I purchased some books almost every month out of my pocket-money. I had thus come to possess a fairly decent library for a Matriculation student. Altogether, I felt that by reason of my extracurricular studies in literature, and the stock of general knowledge I had come to possess, I was far more fitted than my compatriots for receiving training in College. Thus mentally accoutred I sought admission into the first year class of the Patna College in July, 1888, and was enrolled as an under-graduate.