6. My Career At The Patna College

In July, 1888, on the reopening of the Patna College, after the summer vacations, I had taken the first year class as an undergraduate. The Patna College stands today in its main building, exactly as it did in 1888. The central block, a two-storied building, is believed to have been at one time a Dutch factory, and the two wings were added much later, when the College was opened in 1865. The chief feature of the central block is a disproportionately long and narrow hall, which used to be utilised for many years for holding Darbar by the Lieutenant-Governor, or the Governor, of the province, as also for holding meetings of the Legislative Council, until the completion of the special building for the Legislature. The number of students in the first year class was about two hundred. Mr. A. Ewbank, a famous scientist, was the Principal of the College at that time. A son of his was a member of the Indian Civil Service, and served in the Bombay Presidency, and after-wards also under the Government of India. Mr. Ewbank used to take the Physics class for the first year's students. This class used to be held in the detached building-called the Science Laboratory-containing a semi-circular gallery, which is still in existence; but behind it now stands a large structure, in the same style which did not exist at that time.

Almost all the professors of the College were British, and (except the teachers of Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian) there was only one Indian lecturer at that time. He was Prof. Narendra Nath Bose and he was believed to be not only a jack of all trades but also a master of some. He was indeed, a versatile scholar. Put him on to teach any subject, and he would acquit himself creditably. Whenever a British professor would fall ill, Prof. Bose would be told off to fill the gap, whatever the subject - whether Science, Mathematics, History, Logic or Philosophy-as he was regarded equally well adapted to teach each and all these subjects. Not only that but on one or two occasions when the professor of English fell ill, Prof. Bose was asked to lecture on our English text-book also! Besides Mr. Ewbank, Mr. Mowatt, a distinguished graduate of the Cambridge University, was the professor of Mathematics, Mr. Prothero of history, and Messrs. Parry and Robson of English Language and literature. These five British professors, and Professor Bose, were the six teachers, and Professor Bose, were the six teachers, I came in contact with during my career as a student of the Patna College, in the first and the second year classes.

We could not appreciate the teaching of the British professors by reason of our unfamiliarity with the accent and pronunciation of the English language as spoken by them. Still as time passed I began to understand what they said, and to follow their teachings. Mr. Mowatt used to take our class only in Mensuration and Trignometry; while the other branches of Mathematics group used to be taught by Prof. Bose.

Mr. Prothero, the professor of history, came of a distinguished family of scholars, and both he and some other members of his family had achieved success in various literary and journalistic enterprises-one of them having long edited the famous *Quarterly Review*. We were supposed to have done with the study of Indian and British history during our career at school, and so Mr. Prothero used to teach us the histories of Greece and Rome, in which few of us were seriously interested at our age. The two professors who were popular with us were Messrs. Parry and Robson. Mr. Parry was on the verge of retirement. He was a short-statured man, plump but robust, with what is called in India a "French beard". He was a vivacious teacher, and had lately married a lady considerably younger than himself. It was our impression that his lectures in the afternoons were livelier than those in the morning hours, because his butler told us that "his Saheb" used to fortify himself at lunch with a glass of sherry or port.

Mr. Robson was one of the handsomest Englishmen I have seen. He was a bachelor, and had the reputation for being highly popular in social circles-particularly of ladies, with whom he was a great favourite. Years later I met him at Lahore, where he was the Principal of the Government College. He had metamorphosed himself by then into a married man, and looked worn out. He recalled with much pleasure the days when I was his pupil at the Patna College, in the years 1888 and 1889. As regards the books that these two professors of English used to take they included, amongst others, in prose the *Essays* of Sir Arthur Helps[53], and in poetry Scott's *Marmion*[54]. Mr Robson used to take prose and Mr. Parry poetry. Mr. Robson was a fairly dull teacher, and we did not make much headway with Help's *Essays*-particularly with his famous essay on "Organization". Mr. Parry being a lively teacher used to make a greater impression on us when taking *Marmion*. It was thus that I completed my education in the first year class, and was promoted to the second year, after I had sat and done well at the annual examination held in April, 1889.

On the re-opening of the Patna College, in July 1889, I found myself promoted to the second year classes of the intermediate standard, but I had studied for barely three months when I had to transfer myself to the City College, Calcutta. I shall state presently how it came about. During the long summer vacation of 1889, I was at Arrah staying with my parents. I have mentioned in an earlier chapter how I had come to be inspired with the ambition of being called to the English Bar, and also not a mere legal practitioner but a public man. I heard that a fellow-student of mine, in the Arrah Zila School, who had got plucked at the Matriculation, while I had passed, was likely to proceed to England for study, and that his expenses would be defrayed by a leading zamindar (of Surajpura) in the Shahabad district, who afterwards received the title of the

---

53 Sir Arthur Helps, Essays and Aphorisms (The Scott Library), London: Walter Scott, 1892 (revised edition; introduction by E.A. Helps).

54 Sir Walter Scott, Marmion, Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, MDCCCLV (1855).

Raja. This news at once set me a-thinking, and put me on my mettle, as I disliked the idea of being forestalled by any other Beharee Hindu student. Just then it happened that Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya of Allahabad-to whom I had been introduced in the previous December, at the time of the fourth session of the National Congress-came to Arrah on a political mission in connection with popularising the work of the Congress. Born in 1861 Pandit Malaviya was in his 28th year. He had taken already his Arts and Law degrees, and before settling down to practise at the Bar, in the High Court at Allahabad, he was editing a Hindi weekly, called *Hindustan*, which was owned by a well-known Congressman and Talukdar of Oudh, Raja Rampal Singh.

Though below thirty, Pandit Malaviya had already acquired a great reputation as a public speaker, not only in English but also in Hindustani. His visit to Arrah, therefore, roused great enthusiasm, but it was naturally welcomed by me most of all. He stayed at Arrah with a near relation of mine, and I had frequent opportunities of meeting him, and discussing with him my plan for going to England for studying law. Though himself a very orthodox Hindu at that time-though many years later he persuaded himself to attend a session of the Round Table Conference, in London, in 1932-he fully sympathised with my desire to proceed to England, but he said that he was not in a position to secure for me any financial assistance from amongst his friends. My difficulties were very great at that time, as not only no Hindu from Bihar had left for England till then, but being the only son of my parents, I was certain that they, and more particularly my mother, would never agree to let me go abroad. However with such encouragement and sympathy, I started, so to say, a correspondence campaign with almost all the leading public men whose names were then familiar to me; and my only occupation at that time was to write, from day to day, numerous letters, ranging between a dozen and a score! I also hunted out names of eminent political leaders, from general and provincial directories, and compiled quite a formidable list of those whom I thought should address. But I scarcely received reply from any one of my many addressees; and the very few who replied to my letter offered me but lip sympathy, and no promise of cash. But though the situation facing me was gloomy I did not lose courage, and went on hoping against hope that I would succeed in the end. And I did!

After finishing his work at Arrah Pandit Malaviya wanted to come to Patna. The question was where he was to stay. He mentioned the names of several prominent Congressmen who had invited him to be their guest, but he felt some difficulty in staying with any one of them by reason of his orthodoxy. I said that he would be more comfortable if he stayed with me in the little house which was then in my occupation, not far from the Patna College and for which I used to pay a monthly rent of rupees two! I was overjoyed when he accepted my suggestion. I brought him with me to Patna as a highly honoured guest. His friends were naturally surprised to find that he had preferred to stay

with me-a mere College student-rather than with any one of them. He stayed at Patna for four days during which he addressed a number of public meetings in various parts of the city, at which his speeches were highly appreciated and admired, as much for their patriotic sentiments as for his remarkable felicity in wielding with equal fluency the resources of English and Hindustani. Being orthodox, Pandit Malaviya used to cook his food in a little verandah in the house, I supplying him all the commodities required by him. I noticed that he was so studious that even while cooking his food he would be poring over the contents of a book in bright red-cloth binding. Unable to restrain my curiosity, I asked him which book it was, and he told me that it was the latest (1889) edition of the *Statesman's Year-Book*[55]! He spoke very highly of the accuracy and soundness of the general information contained in it on the educational, economic, financial and political condition of each state existing at that time. I was so much impressed with what he said of the merits and utility of the *Statesman's Year-Book* that, from the London) till now, I had studied carefully, with great advantage, each annual edition of that very remarkable reference annual. Pandit Malaviya's visit to Patna, and his staying in my house as my honoured guest is a bright passage in my recollections of a long life. In February, 1944, talking to him, at his house at Allahabad, I was agreeably surprised to find him make a reference to his staying with me, at Patna, in 1889, and cooking his food in the little verandah of my house! He was then in his eighty-third year, but his memory was crystal clear, and he remembered all the details of his visit to Patna, fifty-five years back! From that time till now Pandit Malaviya had been a most prominent figure in the public life of the country. As one of the presidents of the Congress, the single-handed founder of the famous Hindu University at Benares, one of the chief organisers of the Hindu Maha Sabha (over some sessions of which he presided), as a renowned public man and publicist, and a skilful debater in the Central Legislature in the proceedings of which he took a very prominent part for years, Pandit Malaviya was a leader of whom India may genuinely be proud.

After two or three months correspondence with a large number of people in the various provinces of the country, I found that I was not likely to succeed in my efforts to raise the necessary funds from them to enable me to proceed to England, although I just wanted enough money to take me to London, i.e., enough for the passage money and the travelling outfit. I knew that being the only son of my parents they would not let me starve, but would send me enough money to prosecute and complete my studies for the Bar, if only I could get away from India. All that I, therefore, wanted was a sum of rupees fifteen hundred (or say roughly £100, at the then normal rate of exchange) at the outside.

[55] The Statesman Yearbooks were published by Macmillan from London as an encyclopaedic compendium of different countries all over the world, but more particularly concerning the British Empire, of which India constituted a major part.

Having failed in my efforts to raise the amount, and having become more or less desperate, I went to Arrah to seek an interview with Mr. Kandhji Sahay, a leading advocate there, who was a co-villager of the zamindar of Surajpura, who was reported to be willing to finance my fellow-student, the news of whose going to England had roused me to action. He was a liberal-minded gentleman of progressive views and, I thought, he might befriend me in preference to my fellow-student, compared with whom, I was, I felt, superior in many respects. Accordingly I went to him of an evening, and found him fortunately all alone. I had taken with me a written note stating in it my ambition to be called to the English Bar, and to be the first Biharee Hindu youth to achieve that end. I was overjoyed to find that not only was he genuinely sympathetic, but was willing to mark his appreciation of my venturesomeness by offering me a sum of Rs. 1,000. I could scarcely keep my feet on the ground when returning home, with that joyful message from him. I had requested him not to mention the matter to any one, and he said that he himself dare not to do so, because if it came to be known to my parents, and the people of the town, that he had assisted me with funds for such an enterprise, he would incur their serious displeasure, if nothing worse.

Accordingly I returned to Patna and at once started correspondence with the famous firm of tourist agents, Messrs. Thos. Cook and Sons, which had a branch in Calcutta. I worked out the details of my scheme, and took a couple of intimate friends into confidence. I was also corresponding all the time with Mr. Kandhji Sahay, and it was agreed to by him that on a certain date in the last week of September, I should go to Arrah to take the money from him and go straight from there to Bombay, to catch my boat, and trust to luck thereafter. But Fates had ordained otherwise; and in spite of all the care and precaution I had taken to keep the matter a secret, it somehow got abroad, and my father came to know of it. In the result, when I returned to my lodge of an evening, after enjoying myself on the Patna Lawn with my friends I found my father looking extremely miserable. He spoke to me as follows: "I have heard all about your project for going to England. Your mother is disconsolate, and by the time we reach home tomorrow, she may have passed away. Please pack up your things, and come with me by the first train tomorrow. You have studied enough by now, and it is not necessary for you to prosecute your studies any further." This was literally "a bolt from the blue"!

I shall not attempt to describe my feelings at the time, but I thought it best to obey my father, and trust to luck for the future. The next morning my father and I reached home. I was grieved to find a complete change in the appearance of my mother. She looked woefully miserable, and I did feel a pang in my heart to see her in that condition. From that day onwards till I was sent down to Calcutta at the end of October, I stayed in my house at Arrah as an object of pity by my father's friends, and relations, and an object of ridicule, if not

contempt, amongst young men of my own age and standing. The very idea that any one born a Hindu should think of going out of the country, was something horrible to the mind of almost everyone at Arrah at that time, and I have no doubt, it was just the same all over the province of Bihar. But while I was pitied, or looked down upon, by almost all the people of the town, a near relation improved the occasion by suggesting to my father that he should get me examined by doctors to satisfy himself that I was not on the verge of lunacy in contemplating such a horrible and scandalous thing as going to London for study! And so the four or five weeks, that I spent at home were perhaps the most miserable period of my life, which I can now recall. It took me about two weeks to get over my mental worry caused by my discomfiture, and the frustration of my scheme; but after some days I calmly re-considered the whole position, and came to some definite conclusions. These were that I should refuse to prosecute my studies in the Patna College, and insist on my being sent down to Calcutta. This was for two reasons, firstly, I knew that if I returned to the Patna College, I would be an object of scorn to my fellow-students, as a do-nothing who desired to cover his prospective failure at the examination by "cut and run"; but even more important than that was the idea that by living in Calcutta (from which port boats sailed regularly for London), I might be able somehow, and at sometime, to succeed in my project for going abroad, these two considerations-and more particularly the latter-conduced to my decision to continue my studies, if at all, in Calcutta, and not at Patna.

Accordingly, when after a fortnight or so, my father mentioned to me that I should forget the past, and apply myself assiduously to my studies at the Patna College, on its re-opening after the autumn vacation, I told him firmly that I had made up my mind not to go to Patna, but to stay at home all my life, unless he agreed to send me down to Calcutta. My father was most unwilling to do so, and my mother was even more reluctant. There were consultations and discussions not only between my parents and myself, but between my father and mother, and also between some of the near relations and friends of the family. The struggle was long and serious, but I proved so firm in my decision, and so stubborn in my resolution that in the end my parents gave in; for they naturally preferred to give me one more chance of passing my examination and taking my degrees, in due course, rather than keep me at home without any education worth the name. Accordingly arrangements were made to send me down to Calcutta, but it was insisted upon by my parents that I should stay there with the sons of my first cousin, who represented for many years, as agent in the Calcutta High Court, the affairs of the Dumraon estate, and on whose retirement his two sons had taken his place-the elder one as the agent in his father's place, and the younger one as an advocate of the High Court. It was the latter, the advocate, who, on somehow or other coming to know of my intentions to go abroad, had-as I came to know later-betrayed me to my parents.

Naturally, therefore, he was considered by my father as the fittest person to be my guardian in Calcutta.

And so of an evening early in October, 1889, I found myself, accompanied by a servant, in a passenger train, bound for Calcutta. The Calcutta High Court was then closed for the long vacation and was to re-open by the middle of November. My cousin's sons, with whom I was to stay, were not in Calcutta, but at our ancestral village; and on my arrival at Howrah-then, as now, the nearest railway station for Calcutta-I drove (across the famous pontoon bridge at Howrah) to 119 Ripon Street, the residence of Mr. Saligram Singh, the leader in the High Court of the Beharee section of the Indian Bar, there being then no practitioner from Behar, who was a member of the English Bar. Mr. Singh also was not in Calcutta at the time, but a younger son of his, who proved years later a highly successful advocate in the Patna High Court, welcomed me and did the honours of the house, on his father's behalf. I stayed with him for about six weeks, and re-moved to the house of my nephews on their return to Calcutta, on the re-opening of the High Court by the middle of November.