

DILIP KUMAR ROY - NOVELIST AND MUSICIAN.

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ON THE TWENTY SECOND OF JANUARY, 1946, Bengal celebrated the fiftieth birthday anniversary of Sri Dilip Kumar Roy and gave him a purse of about Rs.30,000 for the Yoga-Asram of Sri Aurebinde to which he belongs. Novelist, thinker and musician, Sri Dilip is one of the most interesting personalities whom Bengal, ever fertile in men of genius, has produced.

Though Sri Dilip was born in Calcutta, his family came from the Nadiya District of Bengal. This fact is not without significance because the Nadiya District is hallowed by its association with the life and teachings of Sri Chaitanya. Advaita Goswami, an ancestor of Sri Dilip, was a devout disciple of Chaitanya. The religious strain, therefore, was already in the family and in spite of all the confident scepticism of Sri Dilip's adolescence, was destined to decide the final fulfilment of his life.

Dilip lost his mother early, in 1903. After this bereavement he was drawn all the more close to his father, Dwijendra Lal Roy.* D. L. Roy was a man of exceptional gifts. His literary reputation has been solidly established by all those dramas - Nur Jehan, Rana Pratap, Durga Das, Chandragupta and Mewar Patan, to mention only a few - which created a great sensation in Bengal, when they were first staged. A great idealist, D. L. Roy organised historical material into glowing pageants, which breathed a passionate love of the motherland. But his patriotism was liberal enough to accommodate the equal dignity of other lands, which had cradled different civilizations. D. L. Roy allowed the mind of his son to develop freely and amused tolerance was the only reaction the arrogant scepticism of his son could elicit from him. The intimate contact with such a mind became one of the most fruitful influences of Dilip's childhood.

* In 1945 one of his famous dramas " FALL OF MEVAR " was published by Nalanda Press, Bombay. This was translated by Dilip himself.

The other great influence in his adolescence was the contact with the mind and spirit of Sri Ramakrishna through the book Sri Ramakrishner Kathamrita, which has left an exhaustive record of the utterances of the holy man of Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna moved him profoundly; but he confessed that the personality of Vivekananda did not strike any deep chord in him. Mystifying as this sounds, an explanation may not be difficult. Sri Ramakrishna's nature was transparent, childlike, quietly radiating the serene spirituality of his nature. But Vivekananda, who took upon himself the mission of interpreting his great master to Europe and America had necessarily to adopt the subtle intellectual technique of the West. Therefore, his brilliant intellectual capacity was more often conspicuous than the real core of spirituality in him. Emotional natures reacted to Vivekananda with admiration, with love to Ramakrishna.

Dilip's schooling was irregular. At the age of five he was sent to school, but he detested it and till he was thirteen he was in charge of private tutors. When he was sixteen years old, his father died. His maternal grandfather, Dr. P.C. Mazumdar took charge of him. Unlike Dilip's father who was an idealist, Dr. Mazumdar the millionaire, was a man of the world. There was luxury in the new home and the grandparents simply doted on Dilip. But he was far from happy in his new surroundings.

Dilip secured a scholarship in the Matriculation Examination and in 1913 joined the Presidency College, Calcutta. In 1915 he passed the Intermediate Examination in which he stood high among the first thirty. While working for his B.Sc., degree however, he experienced a great difficulty. His subjects were Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry. He was well up in theory, but found difficulty in mastering Practical Chemistry. He passed miserable days for he hated the laboratory with its awful smell. His inclinations were for Arts but he had taken Science as that was the vogue. At this time, between the age of 17 to 22, he was spending most of his time on music, literature and poetry which had become the ruling passions of his life. His grandparents who were rather orthodox in their ways, had no sympathy for these inclinations and did not like his periodic visits to the various Ustads for his music lessons.

The net result was that he failed in the B.Sc. examination in 1917 in Practical Chemistry. The following year, however, he stood first in the Test Examination in Chemistry Practical and in the final B.Sc. examination he gained a first class, in Honours Mathematics.

After graduating in India in 1918, Dilip Kumar Roy wished to go to England. But his grandfather wanted him to marry into a rich family. Dilip had health, intellect, good connections and his father had left him a rich legacy. Offers came from the families of some of the biggest landholders and industrial magnates of Bengal but to all these Dilip turned a deaf ear. This was due to the influence of Subhash Chandra Bose who had by this time become his hero and his most intimate friend. Both had taken a vow not to marry, though for different reasons. Subhash Bose's motto was to serve the country, but Dilip wanted to serve the Divine. (He hated politics, newspapers and platform-speaking, all of which Subhash adored.*) On the terrace of his father's home, he had built a miniature cave where he often retired for contemplation.

But there were difficulties. Dilip's guardian insisted on marriage since he feared that in Europe the boy would be led astray. Dilip, however, was adamant. In desperation, the grandfather took the grandson to Brahmanand Swami, one of the great disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. The grandfather was, of course, quite unaware of Dilip's adoration of Sri Ramakrishna. Brahmanand captivated Dilip. He contemplated the youngman and assured the grandfather that he would come to no grief; there was an aura of Sri Ramakrishna's protection around him, the Swami said, which made a deep impression on Dilip.

Thus in July 1919, Dilip found himself in Fitzwilliam Hall, Cambridge. He set to work for the Cambridge Mathematical Tripos, kept terms for the Bar and worked for the degree of LL.B. He passed in Part I of Mathematical Tripos and also Part I Music Special of the Cambridge University. But he soon gave up his studies at Cambridge for he found that working at Mathematics and law, his

* This divergence between them was dealt with by Dilip along with biographical details - in his reminiscences THE SUBHASH I KNEW which became one of the best-sellers in India in 1946-47.

soul was getting dry and parched up. With encouragement of Subhash, who was also at Fitzwilliam Hall, he went first to Paris and then to Berlin for further studies in music. He sought the advice of the Director of the Sternes Conservatorium at Berlin and learnt vocal music, violin and voice-production, by the Italian method. He had already learnt playing on the piano at Cambridge. At the same time he learnt German and French which he speaks fluently today.

His visits to the Continent brought him in contact with a number of great men. In 1921 he met Romain Rolland at whose suggestion he was invited by the Society for International Peace and Freedom to deliver a lecture on the Classical Music of India, at Lugano in Switzerland. The lecture was highly appreciated. Mademoiselle Rolland translated his lecture into French. At Lugano he met Bertrand Russell who had come to deliver a series of lectures on China. One of the remarks made by Bertrand Russell which Dilip remembers up to this day was: "I would rather die than preach patriotism". This made a very deep impression on his plastic mind. At Vienna he was the guest of Rene-Fullop Miller and at Prague, he met President Masaryk at his palace where, dining with him, he discussed Gandhiji and Tolstoy. Dilip Roy having declined to accept any money for his lectures, he was presented with a whole set of books by German writers at Prague. He was also invited to give musical demonstrations at Budapest.

In 1922, he returned to India. From 1922 to 1927, he toured the country in search of different ustads of music with the intention of mastering Indian music thoroughly. He recorded his impressions in *Bhramyamener Dinpanijika* (Diary of a Musical Rover) published in 1924. In the same year he had his first interview with Sri Aurobindo. His request for being initiated into the life of a yogi was rejected, as Sri Aurobindo considered Dilip's desire a mere mental seeking. But as Dilip found out later, Sri Aurobindo had prophesied even then that he would come to yoga. About this time Dilip began to write novels in which

he broke new ground; his novels were the first in India in which European life and currents formed the background. His contacts with the European outlook form the theme of the novel, *Moner Parsh* (Contact of the Mind). It is in the form of an autobiography in which he himself is the hero. In 1925, he wrote *Dudhara* (Two Currents), which was later translated into Hindi. It is a novel on sex in which the problem whether one woman can love two men at the same time was taken up. The following year saw the publication of a thousand page novel *Dola* (Oscillations), dealing with the vascillating human spirit in quest of certitudes. Roy has also written several dramas, stories and articles on musical notation etc., the latest being a long article entitled "The March of Indian Music" in the book *Fifteen Years Ahead*. His book "Among the Great" published in 1945* records his conversations and correspondence with Rolland, Russell, Gandhi, Tagore and Sri Aurobindo.

Dilip visited Europe again in 1927. Before his departure, a distinguished gathering of Bengal's intelligentsia in the University Institute, Calcutta, had paid him homage for the work he had done in the cause of Indian music. Among the galaxy of great men there were the poet Rabindranath Tagore, Sarat Chand Chaterji and Subhash Chandra Bose.

In Europe, he gave several lectures on Music but on the whole he was very much disappointed with this second visit. He felt he was wasting his time, that he belonged elsewhere than the hectic West, with its cerebral brilliance and vital energy stupendously wasted. Obeying the obscure but compulsive prompting of his own destiny, he returned from Europe the same year to join Sri Aurobindo's Asram. From this date, music and yoga have become a two-old path of spiritual life for him.

In the fruitful interview which the writer of this article had with Dilip Roy, he preferred to remain silent on his own inner

* By Nalanda Press, Bombay, prefaced by Sir S. Radhakrishnan who wrote " We are greatly indebted to Sri Dilip Kumar Roy for giving us this invaluable book, written with a rare ease and charm and ennobled by a deep moral concern for the good of humanity."

Evolution as a Yogi but made illuminating comments on music. The greatest music, he said, was that in which the human soul confronted God and poured out its loyalty to Him. Such spiritual music, he went on to claim, was absent in the West. But such a generalisation created misgivings. One recalled the music of Palestrina and Bach's B Minor Mass, which is so profoundly genuine in its spiritual quality that both Roman Catholics and Protestants have accepted it as one of most impressive statements of religious faith. Above all, there were the works of Beethoven which asserted the same truth as Roy asserted. "All artistic creation comes from God, and helps in his evolution only in so far as it witnesses to the action of the divine within him." Roy then conceded the mystical quality of the music of Bach and Beethoven but claimed that the spiritual tradition as well as emotional adoration in music was stronger in India than in the West. He cited the revered names of Thyagaraja, Mira, Tulsidas, Kavir, Chandidas, etc.

Roy's own music is predominantly spiritual in quality and his insistence that formal excellence should coexist with spiritual content in order to create great music indicates a path by following which music in India can become at once perfect in form and valid in significance.

(THE HORIZON - 1946)

RABINDRANATH TAGORE.

"Dilip Kumar possesses one great gift: he wants to hear, which is the reason why he can draw out things worth hearing. Wanting to hear is not a passive quality but an active one: it awakens our power of speech. Because we come to know our minds truly through expression, Dilip Kumar has, on many occasions, given me the joy of discovering my own thoughts."

(From the Foreward to Dilip Kumar's book, AMONG THE GREAT 2nd edition.)

"With your capacity and culture you have set about creating melodies for the music of Bengal which is a great thing. For a long time the Goddess of our Bengal music has not received her due quota of homage. You are a fit leader to hoist the banner

of your native country in her kingdom of Delight."

(Translated from a letter written to Dilip Kumar published in the latter's Bengali Book, TIRTHANKAR)

MAHATMA GANDHI :-

I may forget Uma, the Nightingale, though that seems improbable, but how could I forget you ?

(From a letter written to Dilip Kumar by Gandhiji in his own hand quoted in AMONG THE GREAT page 103 2nd edition.)

ROMAIN ROLLAND :-

I hope you are following your musical career as ever. Do not discontinue it. Your task is too fine and you are cut out to accomplish it. Do not let anybody else have the honour.

(Translated from a letter written to Dilip Kumar in French of which the original is published in AMONG THE GREAT page 96.)

Your beautiful letter from Naples moved me deeply and I regretted to learn that you had sailed for India ... No I do not pine at all for Paris. But I regret the distance that separates me from the few friends I have, among whom you are one.

(ibid page 69, 71.)

Almora Hills,
May 31, 1946.

My dear Dilip Kumar,

Thank you for sending me 'Fall of Mewar'. I have little time in recent months to read books. I have now come here, a remote place in the Kumaun Hills, for just five days quiet and rest. I brought a few books with me and among them was 'Mewar Patan'. This morning I read it under the pine trees and I liked it very much. It is powerful and moving. I wish I could read it in the original.

Soon I shall have to leave the cool mountains and return to the hot and dusty city of Delhi with all its burdens.

All good wishes.

Yours

(sd) Jawaharlal Nehru.

" You are a great writer. There are plenty of men who are eager to prove that you are nothing and they are a perserving lot, believe me. But it doesn't matter: your genius is much greater than all their efforts put together and you have the blessings of your great Guru, Sri Aurobindo.... Somebody told me the other day that your novel Dola is now proclaimed wonderful. But didn't I know that? - Specially when you have inherited from your father the heart of an artist And what a rich harvest of pain and delight is borne in your novel 'Maner Parash' where you have felt the pulse of the World's Life in your own heart-beat! "

(Sarat Chandra Chatterji - the greatest novelist of modern India - died 1938.)

LONDON PUTNEY,
22-11-'39.

Dear Mr. Dilip Kumar Roy,

As I am perhaps the first to have read your novel, in English, allow me to pay my tribute to the high qualities that would be evident to any cultured Western reader who was a lover of poetry, and sympathetic to the spiritual outlook you so ardently and beautifully appraise. There is an unmistakable virtuesity in the telling which could not escape discerning eyes in any country.

(The reference is to the Upward Spiral which was originally named, "Mala".)

Brian Rhys.

Kodai Kanal,
28-4-'43.

My dear Dilip,

Just a few lines to tell you how much I have enjoyed and been enlightened by your UPWARD SPIRAL. I finished it in two days. I have rarely perused a book which has given me so much pleasure and sustained satisfaction. If your purpose in writing was to heighten the consciousness of your reader, then

you succeeded indubitably with me. I can only give you my total reaction. There were sentences and phrases that I did not wholly grasp, but I just read on. I was delighted by the beauty and the melody of words. I think on the whole that the character I liked best was Asit.

What wrong I have done you in thinking slightly of your genius. Please forgive me, Dilip.

Many many thanks indeed for giving me the book to read. I do only hope that I may grow more and more conscious of your worth and generosity.

With affectionate gratitude,

Alan Cohayne.

Dilip Kumar Roy needs no introduction as he is well known as a poet of great promise and eminence. But to few is known his wonderful life-history. Born with a silver spoon in his mouth, he was the only son of the great Bengali poet and dramatist, the late D.L. Roy. He was a distinguished student of Calcutta University, graduating with first class honours in mathematics in 1918 at the age of twenty-one. He undertook an extensive tour in Europe where he toured all over the continent studying Western music. He returned to India in 1922 when he undertook another musical tour throughout the length and breadth of this vast peninsula. Belonging as he did to one of the richest and most cultured families of Bengal, he made Calcutta the centre of his musical activities, where his name is a household word. Of a highly philosophical and sensitive temperament, he was gradually drawn to Sri Aurobindo's famous Yoga-Asram at Pondicherry, to which he assigned all his property and income. From within the cloistered seclusion of the Asram he has been cultivating the musical and literary arts. In his novels (e.g. "Who Will Stem The Tides ") we find his extraordinary sensitiveness to the appeal of beauty and art. Here is God's plenty. The writer's universal interest in men and things, his penetration into the mindsof women have

enabled him to produce a magnificent work rich in coinage and superb in execution. He wields a master pen The gramophone recordings of his songs are of the highest order and widely known.

(From a review by Professor Mohini Mohan Mukerji .Calcutta University.)

This handsome, educated young man inherited from his father, D. L. Roy, his love of music and invested it to good account. His voice was enthralling. Who else had his qualifications for being a missionary of music ? He has stirred the heart of the middle class of India (so long as he belonged to India) more than any one in recent years, with the result that music penetrated into the household of every Bengali gentleman. He completed the work of his predecessors in astonishingly little time ... In no account of the recent cultural history of music can his influence be ignored. He was the supreme missionary of music, so long as he belonged to music.. (by Professor D. P. Mukerji).

(From the " CULTURAL HERITAGE OF MUSIC" - Sri Ramakrishna Centenary 1937.)

DILIP KUMAR'S BOOKS IN ENGLISH
PUBLISHED SO FAR BY

Nalanda Publications, Sir Phirojshah Mehta Road, Bombay.

- THE DELIVERANCE - a novelette translated from Sri Saratchandra Chatterji's Bengali original revised by Sri Aurebinde and prefaced by Rabindranath Tagore.
- AMONG THE GREAT - conversations (authorised) of Dilip Kumar with Romain Rolland, Mahatma Gandhi, Bertrand Russell, Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurebinde with their letters.
- THE FALL OF MEVAR- translated from the famous dramatist D.L. Roy's Bengali drama.
- THE SUBHASH I KNEW - biography of the late hero Subhash Chandra Bose.
- EYES OF LIGHT - (In press)
- THE UPWARD SPIRAL - (a mystic novel, to be published.)