

Letters Written by Protap Chunder to his Wife

Translated from Bengali by Subhranil Roy

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## First Letter

Diamond Harbour

12<sup>th</sup> July, 1893

Leaving home is nothing but a nuisance nowadays. Garden Reach would not be many miles from Kolkata, but I was stranded there for twenty hours. I arrived here at noon and now I think I will have to wait here until tomorrow morning. The heat is scorching. It is impossible to sleep well at night. I spent the night switching between trying to sleep in the chair and in the cabin. There aren't any other problems besides this heat. My servant is taking very good care of me. The room is fairly adequate. I was drinking ["Hunyadi" water] until yesterday. I have taken homoeopathic medicine twice since yesterday. It is impossible to pour just one drop of it. No matter how I try, three drops pour out instead of one, so I drink however much pours out. My garments are getting stained. It looks like I would have to change them soon. Paresh and [Prakash] are probably going to leave

today. It is good that they accompanied me up to here along with such a big party to bid me farewell. This has caused the passengers in the liner to regard me with a lot more favour than they normally would have. Everything is going agreeably this time. Now the only aim is to finish the work God has bestowed on me and return home safely. Don't be morose in my absence. Find solace in prayers, for my success will be your pride. I promise you that we are headed for a bright future. I'll possibly be at sea by this time tomorrow and would have to immerse myself in work in the coming days. Always pray to God for my eternal place at His feet, endowing me with holiness. Pray that I may be ready for this grand task I have undertaken. My body is recovering, it seems. Send all your letters to Aden.

Always for your success,  
Ardently in my soul,  
Sri.....

## Second Letter

From Ship [S.S. Khedive]

Bay of Bengal

14<sup>th</sup> July, 1893

You must have received the letter I sent you from Diamond Harbour. We came out to sea at yesterday noon. It was a Wednesday. Scared of any sickness that might take me, I drank some “Hunyadi” water, but it took a toll on my stomach. The sight of the sea, however, took all my troubles away. The endless expanse of rippling blue is like the open arms of a mother. The dancing, churning waves, crowned with surf are like excited children, and I their brother, whose sight has filled them with joy; encouraging me to dance, chanting the name of Goddess Anandamayi. The cool sea air caresses my head, taking all my discomfort with it, taking away all my worries and rushing off to you with good tidings. The sky above is infinite. The water below is infinite. The

thoughts in the mind are infinite. The flow of fate is eternal. From this eternity we come, and to this eternity we return. Why be preoccupied with trivial matters in face of such endlessness? I slept well in the night. Worship eternity, and eternity will give itself to you. It has been raining constantly since last night. The wind is minimal, so the ocean isn't too restive. Everyone on board is in good health. I feel marvellous. The servant is showing considerable care for my person. My diet is going fairly regularly. I am taking cod liver oil at regular intervals. You have no cause for concern. The heat has subsided since we came out into the sea. But I still can't sleep without the window open at night.

15<sup>th</sup> July

The sun is bright today. So is the sea, with little wind. The waves in the water were like wild bulls yesterday, pounding about the ship with mighty roars, fighting the gusts of wind and the rain. Today they are as meek as sheep, sauntering away from me, towards the country, towards Kolkata, leaving my way open. I am the messenger of God. Who will dare hurt me? The One who controls the rain and the wind is with me. What have I to fear? I slept well last night, thanks to the ministrations of my servant in making my bed and allowing enough air into my room. I have been acquainting with some of the people on board. Two of them are Memsahibs. One of them is the wife of the judge Sir Norris. I'm getting along well with them. Everyone is showing some amount of respect and cordiality. My body is recovering slowly day by day. You can rest easy. I am writing daily now. How have you been? What shape has the house taken in my absence? I know Paresh has left. Did anyone else come to see how you have been? I'm sure my absence will cause lots of

changes in daily housekeeping. You will change too. Do whatever you need to maintain your health. Hearing about your ill-health will worry me in the same way hearing about mine would worry you, and it would also hamper my ability to work. Be careful in my absence. Don't let yourself get sick trying to save expenditure. You falling ill will not help with that. Kolkata isn't the best place to be nowadays, so go somewhere else if you wish to. You're accustomed to praying with me, so I know praying alone will be hard for you. I would advise you to pray three times a day, but not for too long except maybe at noon. Read whatever Bengali books you can find. If you need, go to the temple sometimes. Write to me daily like I am doing, so the letters are longer.

16<sup>th</sup> July

Today we are past the Bay and well into the Indian Ocean. The ocean is still, the sky is bright, and the wind is in our favour. We will reach Colombo tomorrow. The doctor gave me something for my pain yesterday, but it still isn't fully gone and the heat is making it worse. My appetite is strong and I'm eating well. I've increased the dose of cod liver oil and it is making me feel a lot healthier. I have no doubt that this sea voyage will be good for my health. I hope it can also enrich my mind. My studying is not progressing exactly to my liking; in fact, I have barely started. The depth of thoughts, the ardency of ideals, the maddening excitation in expectation of the Brahma, the tranquillity of poverty; how will I protect all my belongings amidst this strange company, this alien food, a foreign, irreligious country? I have always tried to turn opposites to my side, to overcome every obstacle, to turn the tides to favour me. All that will hopefully pay off now. I've left behind the clothes and language of the Bengali, and have left all of my connections with Bengal far away



for at least six months. Surely then, I can shed all the faults in the characters of the Bengali – timidity, petty envies, laziness, small-mindedness – in the same stead? Character is essential. Everything else, including what people call dharma is inessential. Character is nothing but the control of self. Only the self can know of the faults in its own character. How can anyone else know? Let the faults be suppressed by he who knows himself in this way. You do the same. Take this vow for a month. Tell Gaurababu to come and read the *Dharmashastra* to you from time to time. We will stay at Colombo for two days. What will I do with all my time here? The ship will definitely become difficult to live in when coal and other cargo is being loaded and unloaded, with all the dirt, dust and disturbances that come with it. I'm thinking of staying the night in a hotel. The Sahibs are all going to do the same. Some are thinking of going on a trip to the mountains in these two days. I might accompany them if my finances allow it. Let's wait and see.

17<sup>th</sup> July

The Petals of Sinhala: we are currently hugging the coast of the island, going forward. The coast is so near, and beautiful beyond words. Dark red waves at the hull give way to ropes of surf embracing the coast of Sinhala. And then, shores of white sand, leading up to the dark jungles of palm trees. Behind all, mountains tear the bosom of the sky. Only in the golden Lanka can a sight like this be seen. Pearls are strewn about everywhere in the seabed. Corals, gems, sandalwood, ivory, ebony, all you can wish for, as much as you need. Coconuts and areca palms are floating in the gentle waves. Everything is available, but the presence of God and true devotion to religion is rare. Two hundred and forty-four years before the birth of Christ, King Asoka sent his son Mahendra and his daughter Sanghamitra with monks and beggar-women to preach the religion of Buddhism in Sinhala. More than two thousand years have passed since then. Idols have taken the place of a faith opposed to idol-worship. Nirvana and monasticism has been wiped out to make

way for desire, corrupted by waylaid philistines. Who will come to renew the faith here? Wherever I go, I want to chant the name of Mangalmaya. Tell the babus to bring the faith of the New Testament to Sinhala. I won't be able to post this letter today. I will do it tomorrow from the post office at Colombo. You will be happy to know that monsoon failed to have any ill effect on my health. One part of my journey is over. Everyone is telling me that I made a good decision in taking the ship from Kolkata. I would love to receive details of your everyday occurrences. Don't do anything these twelve months. Just pray and maintain the *brata* [vow]. Tell the doctor that everyone is very fond of the chair he gave me. He talked to the doctor of the ship on my behalf, who in turn has taken very good care of me. My servant still doesn't know of [pickled lemon] or tamarinds. He calls them "stuff in the glass jars." Even if my stomach is a bit uneasy, I haven't eaten any of them yet. I haven't needed them.

Shri-

### Third Letter

The Ship [S.S. Khedive],

Indian Ocean

20<sup>th</sup> July, 1893

If I hadn't telegraphed you from Colombo then you probably wouldn't have gotten to hear from me for at least 7 to 8 days. These letters take a long time to reach. We left Colombo yesterday. There are no signs of storm yet. But according to every, there will be two to three days of [typhoon] as we get nearer to the Red Sea. We have to wait and see. The night we reached Colombo, Dharmapala and a Sahib came to receive me and I accepted the offer of boarding Dharmapala's father's home. We ate fruits and vegetables of all kinds. We ate in the fashion and grandeur that would have suited Bibhisana and Kumbhakarna in the olden days of Lanka. I couldn't sleep because my room was insufferably hot. But we talked all night about the possibilities of

reintroducing the Buddhist faith. Two of the Sahibs here have converted to Buddhism. One of them was very amiable. I was supposed to give a lecture in the city but the lack of time didn't allow proper advertisement of it. Maybe I'll try again when I'm on my way home. It'll take 10 days yet to reach Aden, and then I'll be able to receive communications from you. I'm waiting patiently.

21<sup>st</sup> July

When will we cross this endless expanse of water? Shadows of people go by night and day. Feast after feast, sleep upon sleeping, thought after thought. Yet you, I, all of us are crossing this ocean. Not of water, but the ocean of time. Every passenger in this world of the living is unknowingly crossing this ocean; how will they know, after all? When I remember how much you had to work to keep me happy, be disturbed and constantly on edge for my wellbeing, I feel grateful that you

have at least six months to rest. But what is the point in resting, if your mind is not at peace? How do you calm your mind? If your conduct is sacred. How do your conducts become sacred? By example, and constant strife and prayer for this sacredness. Have you found your example? Has the will to achieve this sacredness taken hold of you? You have a lot of time to spare now. Your eagerness has subsided. Sadness has taken your side, like a messenger of Heaven. Why wait? I am wayward now. The purpose of spreading the faith is only an excuse. I want freedom. I want to be free from sin, and to be sacred. Why should trouble myself with anything else?

22<sup>nd</sup> July

You will never see weather like this in Kolkata. Neither will you find such food there. You won't find the way of things as it is here, and my health is all the better because of it. My body is getting a red tinge. There are heaps of benefits to this voyage. My thoughts, work, worship, resolve, have

all strengthened. The sea is growing more and more restless now. It'll take us six more days to reach Aden. The sky is dark and cloudy, the wind hits you right in the face, and the heat has died down. The water is black, roaring and foaming. The sound of each wave hitting the ship is like a cannonball ripping through the hull. Time itself seems to be breathing, the waves rising in tandem with each breath. In the dark of the night, the rain starts, and nature takes the shape of Bhairavi. Don't be alarmed, I'm just painting you a picture. For I am the son of Bhairavi. Who will harm me? We'll cross this danger in a mere two days. This ship can't navigate well in such adverse weather. The best it can do is 9 and ½ krosha per hour. It's ambling and rolling slowly towards its destination. Are we – you and I and all of us – walking towards our destiny in the same manner? Ride on the back of the wave, fight against the storm. When nature is against you, relinquish your

hold on your lifeboat, it will take you to Brahma. *Brahma kripahi kevalam*.<sup>1</sup> Sink if you have to, wake if you have to, but continue your journey towards the shores of the Brahma.

Indian Ocean, 23<sup>rd</sup> July

I didn't expect the sea to be peaceful today. So many unexpected occurrences! I hope you have received the letter I posted from Colombo by now. I'm habituated to sleeping with my windows closed in the Kolkata, so the extreme wind is making me a little sick. I just want this heat to pass. The ship has slowed down, otherwise we would have reached Aden faster. I saw Lakshman in a dream I had last night. I crave good news from you. I am not happy with the idea of you staying in Kolkata for the autumn months. You should go to Bankipur for now. I eagerly await your letter.

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<sup>1</sup> The title of a hymn. It roughly means "all is God's mercy."



Today is a Sunday. The ship is supposed to organize a chant dedicated to Mangalmaya Paramaeshwar every Sunday. Two Sundays have passed, and nothing like this has happened. I think I have to give up hope of it altogether. It makes me feel uneasy. Even hearing someone else chanting the name would have made me feel peaceful and clean again. It turns out that neither Kolkata nor this ship can afford me those luxuries. I wish my mind would stay focused His virtues without faltering. That is not possible here.

24<sup>th</sup> July, Arabian Sea

Do I need to write every day? Every day passes the same way. I'm getting used to the food. My diet will vary a lot in these twelve months. Even if the food here is more nutritious, I wish I could rush home just to taste your recipes one more time. I have to wait a long time for that now. Whatever clothes you packed for me are not easy to find when I'm in a hurry. I lost one of my

hats. I have lost and found my money bag more than once, no matter how careful I am. The keys are in my pocket, which is why I haven't lost them yet. But it's difficult to remember and I have to search everyone of my pockets before I find them. I will be relieved when I can hand over to you what's yours.

25<sup>th</sup> July, Arabian Sea

This constant jerking of the ship won't stop until we cross the Arabian Sea. Three more days! The sea is restless. There isn't much rain or storm and the heat is rising again. But the waves haven't subsided. It should stop by tomorrow, and we will hopefully reach Aden the day after. I haven't experienced any sea sickness, but the water is everywhere in the ship like a mist churned out from the ocean. It sticks to the clothes and makes me feel ill. The pain in my hand hasn't gone away completely, probably because of this uncomfortable weather. I'm still writing to you daily. I feel

the absence of your voice. It's the 25<sup>th</sup> today, and I boarded from Kolkata on the 11<sup>th</sup>, so it's been exactly two weeks. I don't think I will reach London for at least 3 weeks now. I am happy you didn't come with me. It would have proved a lot of unnecessary suffering for you. I hope you're well. News of your wellbeing will be a relief.

27<sup>th</sup> July

The ocean, the air, the sun – everything seems inebriated today with a calm, disorienting heat. We are almost out of the clutches of the monsoon season and in a week will be out of the clutches of summer. I still haven't been acquainted with seasickness, not even for an hour. The Sahibs are astonished at this. But I shouldn't boast. Men pride can turn into their downfall in the matter of an hour. I just wanted you to know that I am well. I know how relieved you will be to hear that. The Almighty prepares His missionary with the strength he needs. The work is both the service and the

reward. For me, this sea voyage is the reward, and a welcome one. I forget it sometimes at moments of ungratefulness. I hope I can finish my appointed work, and I need your help. The news of your happiness, your wellbeing, your following the Brahma *brata* like I did, you getting along with everyone around you will help my work profoundly. I pray that I don't fail the opportunity He has given me. It's too expensive to send telegraphs from Aden. It's more than three thousand miles from Kolkata! That's it for today. May God watch over you. May His devotees be drawn to you.

#### Fourth Letter

Red Sea,

29<sup>th</sup> July, 1893

I got your letter yesterday after coming to Aden. Only you can write this way. I feel blessed to read it. I read it again and again. I plan to read it more during my journey. I don't think I will be

able to receive any more of your letters before I reach London. No matter how low a husband is, the dutiful care of his wife will lead to her own greatness. I hope I can someday become worthy of your love and respect. I thought of sending you a telegraph from Aden, but upon reaching I was told that I would have to pay 20 Rupees for every two words. I don't have too much Indian money and I don't want to exchange the foreign currencies before I get to London. So forgive me for not being able to send you messages until I get there. Maybe you'll get this letter before that happens.

I have crossed three seas and am on the fourth. First the Bay of Bengal, then the stormy Indian Ocean, the Arabian sea, and now the Red Sea is before me with a proper introduction to summer. It is really hot. I am following the cool footsteps of the One who led me here. He helped me bear many summers, winters, and many pains. Where is he today? I have never been one for company. I don't like the babble of people. I am lonely in the truest sense of the term, waiting

patiently to gain His eternal company. He is in every article in the world. I don't want your heart or mine to be empty of his presence for even a moment.

Hirananda is dead? What a horrifying piece of news! Has it been a year? The flame of hope for an entire province is gone. We lost a gem. The hearts of many accomplished people are now dark. I don't know where anyone lives anymore, but I hope everyone can get their desired work done as fast as possible. You can never know when your final hour will come. The part of your letter related to news is too short. I hope people are taking care of you. Friendship is the true virtue in times like these. I don't have much to report about the ship. I have lost a pair of shoes. [unreadable sentence] I haven't been able to eat most of the fruits you packed for me. The Sahib servant, Harris, has to take care of many people. He's a little tired after massaging me with cod liver oil and other medicinal oils. I also took many fruits from Colombo, and most of it is rotting now. I still have [pickled lemon] and tamarinds to keep me company. I think they will survive this

journey and come back to Kolkata with me. It's too hot to write any more. I will just close my eyes for some time.

31<sup>st</sup> July, Red Sea

The sweltering heat prevented me from writing anything yesterday. Everyone on the ship was panting and a little wind felt like life itself. There was no sleep to be had in the night, no rest in the morning. My body is covered in heat rashes. I abandoned my cabin and just laid on the deck like a dead person for these two days. The pain in my hand has gotten better. The sea is calm like a pond, but the sky is raining fire. There is the Arabian desert on one coast of this sea and the African desert on the other. That is what is making the weather so hot. This is probably why they call it the "Red Sea." Today it's a little less hot and everyone's relieved. Within two days we'll be in

European waters and out of the summer season. We'll reach Marseille within a week and then, two days later, London.

Of the many beautiful words you have written, some have caught my attention, and opened my eyes to divinity in my helpless condition here. You are right in saying that peace will never be ours if we don't learn from our worst circumstances. Let's never forget this. I left you alone to travel halfway around the world, but your love, the divine in you is with me. You're with even if you're not. I only pray that your love takes you towards holiness, freedom, and heaven. Unconditional love is a trait people never fail to ignore, including me. This makes me shameful and sad, but in the course of my regret, I pray to the almighty only that I can become an example of merit, dedication and devotion. I also pray that you become an example of *sātitya* [the ideal wife] and carer of your husband.

[unreadable line]



The Sadhu can never succeed in his enlightenment without help from his “Sadhi.” Will God not allow you to partake in all fruits of my life? Concentrate on your *dharma-brata* more than you have ever before.

2<sup>nd</sup> August

We have crossed the Red Sea and its intolerable heat. Now we’re moving through the Suez Canal. The morning was a little cold... [unreadable]... the sand dunes of the Sahara.... [unreadable].... By 11 am the heat was building again.... [unreadable]... my entire body from... [unreadable]... filled with heat rashes.... [unreadable]... difficult to breathe. From today.... [unreadable]... will probably reach port Said by tomorrow [or tonight]...[unreadable].... The way I came through... [unreadable]... let’s hope that without any trouble here... [unreadable]... reach Marseille. Now... [unreadable]... you’ll receive... don’t know...[unreadable]....

## Fifth Letter

Mediterranean Sea,

4<sup>th</sup> August 1893

All storms have subsided. All the heat is gone, too. All my fears have been erased from my mind. The peaceful waters of Europe are making the wind cool and pleasant. I offer my thanks to the Destroyer of all obstacles. He is truth. I have made a mistake. I have accidentally posted a letter addressed to you through Port Suez instead of Port Said. It will probably be delivered to you a week late. Maybe [unreadable] from Aden, You will get both letters together. Let me know the date of their delivery. I miss the Indian Ocean despite its storms. It was better than the heat of the Red Sea. Hopefully these few days ahead will be better. If all goes well, we should reach Marseille by next Tuesday. It will take two more days to reach London. That will be a whole month since I

left Kolkata. Dharmapala, coming from Colombo will probably reach London before us so I will rendezvous with them when I get there.

5<sup>th</sup> August

I changed my cabin. My new cabin is a deck below where I originally stayed. This cabin is bigger, and I slept well in the night. I couldn't sleep in the little cabin on the upper deck. The heat was making it impossible to sleep outside. The lower cabin is much more comfortable. I have started studying thoroughly again. There is so much work to be done! Let's hope whatever I can do will make the "Mangalamaya" happy. My only wish, day and night, is to see the happy face of the Mother. But how can I? in a ship filled with Sahibs and Mems, with luxury and sport and decadence, I am an exile, alone, trying to read, write, walk, think, all in accordance with the *brata* to please God. I love everyone and hope for love from everyone. I don't really care if I don't

receive that love. It's much better to give than receive. Loving everyone with the witness of the Knower-of-all is the goal, no matter what consequences await. There is no space to keep track of who did what for me. What matters is what I did didn't do for everyone. It has never been the fate of any to enjoy family, luxury, and dharma, so why should it be any different for the both of us? How many are lucky to have what we already have? Never be ungrateful, even for a day. Never doubt in the mercy of the Eternal Father. He is always merciful to us. When will we understand?

6<sup>th</sup> August

We're sailing across the Mediterranean. The sea doesn't end. We will probably be in French waters by Tuesday night. Then I'll be able to post this letter. but how will I receive news from all of you? I hear Kolkata is experiencing a lack of rain and a heat wave right now. When I was at home, there would be a "pankha-puller," but not now. I am living like a king – eating good food, wearing good

clothes – but what about you? Whenever I think of this I don't want to be away from you. But then I remember all those time I used to get angry, ill-tempered, impatient, intolerant, and hampered everyone's peace and set a bad example of myself, and I don't want to return home anymore. I can't get angry at anyone here since the only one losing anything by way of my intolerance will be me. I wish I could return home as a god, for I have sinned much and put a lot of my sins on you, as well. I will have to suffer for all of it. But can I repent in my old age and weakness? I only hope to be redeemed in the eyes of the One who is the ocean of forgiveness.... [unreadable]... I still haven't learned to suppress my instincts.... [unreadable]... no more lateness is tolerable now. Today is Sunday. Did you fast today? ...[unreadable]... divide up your prayer time in small parts... talk to the Mangalamaya at least once a day with all your heart. I participated in a service held for Sahibs today. It was all a little pleasurable. The sophistication of the order and operation of this ship is astonishing. It's like a large family.

7<sup>th</sup> August

I have changed my mind. I will directly get off at London instead of stopping at Marseille. This means one more week in this ship. But the weather is cooling now so I hope my health will recover. A certain Mr. Spears has invited me to stay at his home for a fortnight. But I think one week should suffice. It would also be a great hassle to go through France. I should instead conserve my health for the task ahead instead of exhausting myself on the journey. The is how you prepared yourself when you were away from Kolkata for five weeks...[unreadable]... How are you?

8<sup>th</sup> August

Tonight the ship will reach Marseille. We will spend the entire day there and leave for England the day after tomorrow. There won't be any need to write to you tomorrow. I hope my health will improve in the following week. I haven't got much news of Kolkata since I left. May the

Mangalamaya take you in Her safe embrace and impart Her great wisdom to you. If you feel relieved by the news of my arrival in London and want to travel some places, please do that. What else can I say? I think of you all the time. Do what you can to brighten my name, and the name of dharma to people. May the Destroyer of obstacles always be with you.

Shri.....

#### Sixth Letter

10<sup>th</sup> August, 1893

I toured a lot in Marseille yesterday. This is a small French town with backwaters behind me and beautiful mountain ranges in front of me. Almost 400,000 people live here. They are very pretty, clean, and cheerful. Not the chalky whiteness that we find in the Englishmen. But they don't understand any language other than French. I hired an interpreter but neither of us can understand

the other's English. He's just a drain on money and liquor. I thought of you a lot and wanted you to see this. But then I thought it was a good thing that you didn't come, because the exhaustion of the journey would have been too much for you. I myself am finding it hard to stay afloat among all this – how could you have managed? We left for England today. I'll receive all your letters from London now. Today is Thursday. We will probably reach by Tuesday or Wednesday next week. These two days have been good for my health. Even spending the whole day yesterday in the Sun did not have any adverse effect on me. On the contrary, I feel stronger. I hope I get even stronger by this next week. Don't forget to send in letters via every weekly mail. There's nothing else to look forward to in this foreign country. Give me all the news. Don't leave even the smallest details out. I wish my friends from Kolkata could write to me every week but I know that is not possible.



I will stop writing and get to work now. All I want to think about is work now. Don't delay in your own duties. I have given myself over to that task. Fate will take care of the rest. Let Him know your desires. Follow the will he gives you. This is dharma.

12<sup>th</sup> August, 1893

The fortress ridden shores of Spain on one side and the mountain ranges of Africa, devoid of people or greens, on the other. We are sailing up the narrow stream in between. The water is peaceful, the wind is cool, and the sunlight feels beautiful. I am filled with hope, and the place of my work lies ahead of me. We will reach London quickly. I will send you a telegram when I reach. I will return home a new man. You will also probably be a new person by then. I won't get angry at you or annoy you any more with my tedious intolerances. You will also not be angry at me or deride my actions. If God is near this will be possible, and we'll know.

Bay of Biscay,

14<sup>th</sup> August

The part of the Atlantic we are sailing through now is called the Bay of Biscay. This part of the sea is notorious for its stormy weather. The grace of the Almighty is strange. It has kept the sea calm, the weather cool. There are no storms, no rain, no heat. I have started taking out my winter garments. The luxurious activities of the passengers are amusing. So many ingredients go into our food! Sometimes I wish to reduce my diet, but I fail. The English servant is very obedient. The white sailors take an astonishing amount of care of the chair Dr. Dutta gave me. They fitted a small pillow on top of it where my head would go. The dhoti you gave me has been tailored to make to pillowcases. That chair has helped me spend many nights. I couldn't sleep in the night in those days. I am somewhat ashamed to wear the fine garments here. Remember how we used to tread through the city when we had no money, and how much you had to suffer because of my lack of

means? Thinking back on those times turns me away from the finery of this ship. I keep my head up just to keep the Lord proud, otherwise...[unreadable]... you get gaslights and in my cabin I get... [unreadable]...

Don't be restless. Learn to be calm, sombre. My bottle of cod liver oil has been empty for quite some time now. My health is improving every day. Nothing would be of greater comfort than receiving good news from you when I get to London. Give my love to Ramlal, Baroda babu, Pramatha babu, Masur babu, Nagendra babu, Haragopal, Snehalata, Mrs. Dutta, Shanyal Thakurani. If I think of anymore I will let you know.

Plymouth,  
16<sup>th</sup> August, 1893

We reached the coast of England in the morning. The ship will dock in London tomorrow. I don't think I will be able to write anything tomorrow. There is a strange smell in the air that reminds one of antiquity. I am grateful to the Mangalamaya. Everything is unspeakably bright and dazzling in His presence. He is not without form anymore. It is almost as if He is standing in front of me, the great sage. Don't fear for me. May He accompany you in the same way He accompanies me. May His presence ensconce you. I have never gone abroad in this fashion before. I hope I will get your letter tomorrow.

## Seventh Letter

London, 20<sup>th</sup> August

Know that the Mangalamaya is always present beside me. Imagine His right hand on my head like an umbrella in its protectiveness. Imagine His left hand enveloping me in a loving embrace. His face full of delight, as bright as the sun, is always beside me. As long as this Presence is with me I am without fear, grief, or sin. I only worry that His presence might not be felt anymore by me. What will I do then in this foreign land? He is so close to me, but is He far from you? It is discomfoting of me to think that. You need His Holy company more than me. I am here to please Him and have many friends here. I don't know who looks at your face nowadays. I pray the Witness of the world may always remain close to you. I reached London last Thursday. It is as hot as Jyaistha here. I am always welcome in house of my friend Spears. London is not like an alien land to me. The wind, sky, the trees, the streets, the shops, the people – everything has an air of

familiarity. The Spears' now live in a bigger house than before. Their garden is abundant in fruit-filled trees. Their children have grown up. Mrs. Spears has aged somewhat but is still a quiet and busy person like before. Spears is still the same. He's 68 years old now, but has the enthusiasm and mindset of a 28 year-old. Lily came to see me yesterday and she spent the day here. She is just like she was before. But it seems like she has to do a lot of chores in her house. I gave lectures and advice to many listeners in Spears' dharma temple yesterday. I hear that some newspapers here are already writing about me. There is a lot of work to be done here. There is a friend from Bombay called Nagarkar who has been living here for quite a long time. He will be going to America with me.

23<sup>rd</sup> August, 1893

Days have been storming by since I came to London. I can't even begin to narrate how busy I am. Only someone who has witnessed it can know.

So, Lakshman is dead. Who will look after his children, his work, his land, his charities? I knew he wouldn't survive. But his death is a huge loss to the Brahma Samaj. Nobody can mitigate this. Everyone loved to go to Mangalgaonj and Khatura. Who will travel there now? Everyone says goodbye at some point. How can I be assured of anything after this? Finish your work. Finish your work as soon as you can. Prepare yourself for the Divine Place. Learn to let go of earthly things and prepare yourself by worshipping love. Don't be distracted by hazards. Don't denounce the voice of your soul. You never know what is going to happen. Pray for me every day. Pray for the completion of my *brata* and my salvation. Pray that I may learn to love, be holy, and learn to

sacrifice. I am well. I am well-dressed and well-fed, and unready. I must never forget the fact of my own poverty.

24<sup>th</sup> August

I have received two of your letters since arriving here. Both were written rather hurriedly and are not enough. I won't get any more of your letters in England because I will be leaving for America tomorrow. It will take a week to reach and another week to get any mail. So you won't be getting any mail for two weeks. Don't be morose because of this. I only stayed in London for a week. I did manage to do some work. Now my real work is in America. Let's see how that goes. You have stayed in Kolkata for two months now. Don't you want to visit Bankipur? I'm not pushing you on this matter. You must look at all sides and try to do what you think is best. It is a relief to hear that prayers are continuing at Peace Cottage. I am well. People in England told me that my features



haven't changed at all in these 10 years. I don't find that believable in the slightest. But so many people said this that it would have made you happy. The way in which I have toured London extensively in open sunlight in these few days would be inconceivable in Kolkata. It is really hot. The mercury exceeded 92 degrees. But I felt no discomfort. I stayed in England for a week and already there was a press hype surrounding me. Spears has collected all that coverage and published them in his paper. He has sent them to you. It is remarkable how different his luxurious home is from our broken cottage of a home. I don't like it here and am filled with a sense of indifference. I am ardent in my will to escape from here – to go back to my broken cottage and eat rice and vegetables again. But why am I so ardent? What use am I to you, or anyone, in this life or the next? What is the difference then, to me, between a cottage and a palace? Only One is with me, giving me hope, fending off my fear. He is crossing a sea far more hazardous than any I am going to cross. I am searching for Him, always. I am finding Him, losing Him, and finding Him again.

Everything is beautiful when I see Him. My mind fills with delight. Look at him closely and you will see me.

29<sup>th</sup> August 1893

It's 9am here so I guess it is 2 in the night in Kolkata. Your night is my day. The Gita says that when the Yogi wakes, the *bhogi* goes to sleep. We are always sleeping, even when we're awake. I gave a lecture in the ship yesterday afternoon. A lot of people attended. There will be another one tomorrow. Today is Wednesday. We should be at New York by Sunday. I have left some of my clothes at Mrs. Spears'. Mrs. Spears has given my tin trunk a makeover with some kind of webbing. It looks different now. You would have been delighted to see it. The air here is very healthy and it is making me feel excellent. My skin has gotten back its old colour. Now I only hope that my temper survives this. So many people are complimenting my lectures that it is very easy

to get attached to them. The medicine of all this is back in Kolkata. All this love, friendship, and wealth is undoubtedly the blessing of the Mangalamaya. I accept it with a bowed head – grateful and a little afraid. Wealth and disaster have had ample presence in my life. Have I been able to use all this opportunity? If not, then I must try harder. And so must you. I hope to see a different version of you when I return home.

2<sup>nd</sup> September

Thanks to the grace of Mangalmaya I reached New York without any trouble today afternoon. There was a Sahib waiting for me at the port here. It would have been extremely difficult to collect my luggage if he hadn't been there. I am currently with him a very nice hotel.

3<sup>rd</sup> September

I gave a lecture to a very high-class church here today morning. I am exhausted now. My hotel room is very well-decorated. I will set out for Chicago tomorrow. I am a poor man amidst a vast, rich, populous country. Discussing my own luxurious lifestyle here even astonishes me. But my inner divine soul has awakened amidst all this variety. I am fearless. My mind and soul is in His hand now. He has helped me come this far, I am not leaving Him now. I hope to receive news from you after reaching Chicago. That's it for today. May the Mangalamaya be with you always.

Forever yours,

Shri xxxx

## Ninth Letter

Chicago,

6<sup>th</sup> September, 1893

Thanks to the grace of Mangalamaya Parameshwar, I have reached without any delay. I arrived here at two and took refuge in the home of a believer. I don't think there will be any problems. I hoped I will get mail from you as soon as I arrived here, but that wasn't the case. I have only gotten two letters from you since I left. I don't know how many of my letters you have received. I have arrived at my destination. Now I have only to follow God's will. There are more countrymen with me. Dharmapala, Nagarkar from Bombay, and two more from Bombay. We have all been graced with love and admiration, especially Dharma and I. The weather isn't too cold, but cold wind started blowing suddenly one day. I want to live closer to the Grand Fair – maybe in a small hotel. But I think I will have to remain here for a few days. I think of you and want to see you all the

time. But you wouldn't have been able to tolerate the journey. My only hope is that you are well in Kolkata.

Chicago

8<sup>th</sup> September

I went to see the Grand Fair yesterday. It was strange beyond description. I wish someone who was good with words could write it down as I described it. A completely different kingdom was writ here. A hundred skyscrapers, each at least 3 to 4 hundred *hāth* long, huge and wide streets, lakes, rivers, objects and articles of all kinds to buy, people from every culture, celebrations of every creed, theism and atheism of different sorts – it's all here. Yesterday 200,000 people came to see the Mela, and the organizers still aren't pleased. They want at least 10 million people to come and see! It is impossible to see everything in one day. I will have to visit again. I want to

show you all of this. But we are divided by seven seas. Kolkata is more than 13,000 krosha from here. May the Almighty who brought me here protect you and me from all dangers. I await His eternal light every day. This land, this Mela, the mood here – everything has His presence.

10<sup>th</sup> September

Today was a Sunday. I just returned at five from a place of worship. I feel lonely and tired. I wondered why I haven't received your letters yet. Then I saw your handwriting. I feel numb and absent-minded. Write to me. Write anything. Whatever you write will be good for me. It will calm my mind and also be good for you. Can't you write a few lines to the one for whom you have done so much? I want to scold you, but my eyes tear up instead. Nobody must be sleeping upstairs in my home since it is so hot. You are suffering, while I am living so luxuriously here in this palace. I think about you a lot. I don't know whether you think of me. Heaven will mean nothing to me if

I'm there and you aren't. I will pray for hell then. No matter how I make you suffer or disturb you, nothing in my life can move without you. Wherever I have erred, forgive me. Gods won't have any place for me among them if I neglect your care even in the slightest. Remember this and keep it in mind always while communicating with me. I await your hopeful voice in this foreign land. Don't hesitate to make yourself known.

One of your letters was dated 1<sup>st</sup> August and the other one was dated 2<sup>nd</sup> August. I don't understand the meaning of this. I got the second one fifteen days after I got the first. I have written to you almost every day from the ship. Let me know when and how you get them. I am sure you have received them all by now. I left everything too eagerly in your lone hands, I know. The One I needed to be with me is with me, so I don't need to think about my work here anymore.



12<sup>th</sup> September

The World's Parliament of Religions began yesterday. The ten greatest faiths of the world were represented. The audience liked what I had to say about Indian religion. People from China, Japan, Turkey, India, and Europe came in different attires and spoke about the significance of their own faiths. There were no objections and no quarrels. Everyone heard everyone with great respect and kindness. Witnessing this parliament can give one an idea of what shape religion will take in the future. Nobody has abandoned their own faiths listening to someone else, but everyone respects everyone else. You can call me a barbarian among these erudite, civilized, adept emissaries. But all of them are so respectful of me that even the attitudes of my old friends cannot compare. This is all God's doing. Only He determines what to make people believe wherever they live in the world. I hope I can always walk in the footsteps He shows me. I have written to you so much among all this work – why can't you write to me? I have spoken at the Parliament twice in two

days. It is all very encouraging. Many papers have published pictures of me. Let us see what the future holds. That's it for now.

### Tenth Letter

[20<sup>th</sup> September]

I got your letter dated 9<sup>th</sup> of August. The doctor also sent me one. A lot must have happened in Kolkata since you last wrote. Maybe you aren't even in Kolkata anymore. Maybe you are in Bankipur now. And maybe the love and care you are receiving there has made you forget me. I am working a lot here. A lot of people are coming to see me – so many compliments every day!

I am trying to find peace amidst all this. But what can I do? Nobody will give that opportunity here. You wrote that there is not much to write from Kolkata. I have so much to write here that I can't manage to find the time. I wish there was a secretary to dictate to. I just returned

home – tired and wanting to rest. But the mail will leave tomorrow so I might not get an opportunity to post this if I don't write it now. I saw my old friend Mr. Barrows and his wife today. He kissed my hand as soon as he saw me. Nobody has shown me that kind of respect before. It was like meeting a blood relation. Mrs. Burrows complained that she hasn't received the picture of you. Send her a good picture of yours. I will stay in Chicago for another week. The Fair will break up then. I will travel some other parts of the country. I won't be able to from here to you...

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## Eleventh Letter

Chicago

27<sup>th</sup> September, 1893

Our work at the Parliament ended today. I will leave Chicago for other places now. Thanks to the Mangalamaya that I could finish His work. All of my work has finished. I had a lot of fanfare here. I am not ungrateful for this. I am truly humbled by all of it. I hope I could make the Almighty proud. I could serve my nation and my faith in this age – with my broken body – all because of Him. His blessings delight me. Now to spread His faith elsewhere. Pray for my wellbeing and tell my friends to do the same. I hope I return with a smiling face. I forgot to bring a picture of me for you from here. I'm sorry. Even when His presence is with me, when I'm tired, sad, lonely, thinking of home, or I want to return; your face comes to mind. My days in this country would probably be drawing to a close by the time you get this letter. I should have addressed all my letters via Spears,

because I don't know how they will be delivered if I change my address. And my American address...

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