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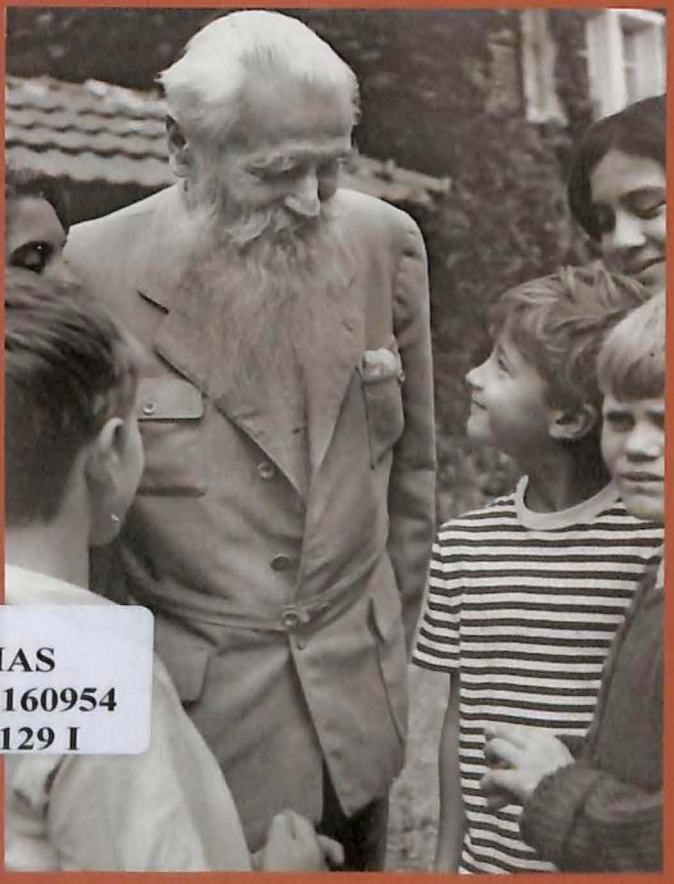
Rabindranath Tagore Meets Paul and Edith Geheeb



MARTIN KÄMPCHEN

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Acknowledgements

My interest in the subject of this book began two decades ago when I was researching Rabindranath Tagore's relationship with Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. I visited Paul Geheeb's Ecole d'Humanité several times and was allowed to use the school's archive freely. I thank the then director, Armin Lüthi, and others, especially Jürg Jucker and Barbara Hanusa, for their generosity in providing me with advice and the necessary documents. Some parts of the archive of the Ecole d'Humanité in Goldern on the Hasliberg have been transferred to the Hessische Staatsarchiv in Darmstadt in 2017 and incorporated in the body of the Staatsarchiv. The process of rearranging the Ecole's archive and the awarding of new acquisition numbers is not yet complete. Hence I had to identify the sources partly as 'Archive of the Ecole d'Humanité' (AEH) and partly as 'Hessisches Landesarchiv Hessisches Staatsarchiv, Darmstadt' (HLA HStAD).

The Ecole must be commended for having built up and maintaining its vast private archive containing thousands of letters and other documents. It shows the Geheebs' sense of mission and sense of history as well as the founders' self-assured knowledge of their school's importance right from the beginning.

At that time, Debajyoti Ganguly was my research assistant in Sāntiniketan and was already working on the Geheeb file at Rabindra Bhavan, Visva-Bhāratī, Sāntiniketan, West Bengal. Andrew Robinson, who was preparing his biography of Tagore, shared valuable documents with me. With my guidance, the artist Sanyasi Lohar, who was then a student of Kala Bhavan, Visva-Bhāratī, visited the Ecole three times to teach art. Thus, the school's link with Sāntiniketan was kept alive, and I was happy to continue my research while visiting Sanyasi.

When I was invited to the Indian Institute of Advanced Study (IIAS) in Shimla as its Tagore Fellow for 2016–18, I knew that the time had come to shape my research material into a book. I thank the then director, Chetan Singh, for inviting me, and many staff members of the IIAS, especially Renu Bala, Rakesh Sharma, and Prem Chand, for showing me excellent hospitality apart from advice and friendship.

While working on the book in Shimla and later in Sāntiniketan and Germany, I was also supported in my research by Supriya Roy, Subhash Mukherjee, and Rajendra Nath Sarkar in Sāntiniketan, Sailesh Parekh in Ahmedabad, Kathleen O'Connell in Canada, Maria Ossowski, Walter Sucher, and Arabella Unger in Germany, as well as Batja Håkansson and Tineke Adolphus in Sweden. Klaus Jork kindly gave me shelter when I worked in the Hessische Staatsarchiv, Darmstadt, Germany. In that archive, Oliver Groh was most anxious to provide all the documents I needed. The Udo Keller Foundation gave me generous financial support to continue writing this book after I left Shimla. My gratitude to all of them!

Finally, I thank Oxford University Press for taking an interest in this project and making its passage from manuscript to published book so smooth.

Sāntiniketan
April 2019

Notes on the Manuscript

Diacritical marks have been added in the main text, but not in the notes or the Bibliography. Also, diacritical marks for common names such as Rabindranth Tagore and Jawaharlal Nehru have been avoided. Throughout the book, I have used diacritics only for *matras* (elongations of the vowels). This is to ensure that readers are able to pronounce the terms and names derived from Sanskrit or Bengali words as correctly as possible.

We have decided to include the German quotations in the original along with my English translations for them. These have been given in the footnotes. I have kept the original punctuation in the German while adjusting punctuation to the standard usage in my English translation.

During the two-decade-long gestation period of this book, I have collected and been sent a large number of documents and copies of documents, including photographs, related to the subject from private persons as well as some institutions for my use. I have subsumed this material in the Bibliography under 'Collection Martin Kämpchen'. In the footnotes this figures under the term CollMK.

In the footnotes, I have used the short form of a book title (while the full title is in the Bibliography). The first name of the author has been included only if there are two or more authors with the same family name (for instance, Rabindranath Tagore and Saumendranath Tagore). I have used the year of publication only when I quote from several books by the same author.

”

Introduction

Psychologically, it is certainly interesting that Shantiniketan and the Odenwaldschule developed totally independent from each other, not knowing of each other for many years, until gradually numerous students and friends of Tagore stayed with us in the Odenwald and praised our school as the Shantiniketan of the Occident. When, finally, in the summer of 1930, Rabindranath Tagore spent a few days with me, he declared that the atmosphere of the school made him feel quite at home.

—Paul Geheeb[1]

The only hope of saving civilization is through 'enlightened' education, and organizations like your Institut Monnier and my Santiniketan have indeed a great role to play.

—Rabindranath Tagore[2]

[1] Paul Geheeb, 'Idee und Projekt einer Schule der Menschheit', p. 174.

[2] Letter to Paul Geheeb, whose school was founded as Odenwaldschule in 1910. After he emigrated to Switzerland, the school was first lodged in the Institut Monnier; later it moved into its own buildings and was given the name Ecole d'Humanité.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) founded his Brahmāchārya Āshram in Sāntiniketan in 1901. Paul Geheeb (1870–1961) and Edith Geheeb (1885–1982) founded the Odenwaldschule in Germany nine years later, in 1910, and thereafter a new school in 1934 in Switzerland which was to become the Ecole d'Humanité (settling down in its present location in 1946). Against the background of these pioneering educational institutions, a remarkable chapter of an Indo-German encounter has unfolded. But Paul Geheeb, a name familiar in Germany and Switzerland for his contribution to the Reformpädagogik (New Education Movement), has—in India—not really been recognized as a European personality close to Rabindranath Tagore, either in spirit or in action. This is despite their having met each other in Germany in 1930 and maintained contact for a decade. The affinity of their educational vision has never been elaborated in Tagore studies.

While perusing the published and unpublished material by and on Paul and Edith Geheeb and their close associates in Europe and in India, a densely knit web of relationships began to unfold. It became apparent that the Geheebs were in touch with a broad cross section of personalities who had an active interest in the spiritual, social, and political life of India and who, at the same time, were engaged in peace activism between the two World Wars in Europe.

Both Paul Geheeb and Rabindranath Tagore saw themselves as deeply committed educators. Their respective school projects were at the heart of their creative lives and became very much the receptacle of their national and international contacts. These schools influenced and shaped to a fairly large extent the image and the international outreach of their founders.

From the Indian side, the best-known figure who had an association with Paul and Edith Geheeb and their circle was Rabindranath Tagore. To their meeting in 1930, which has not been described at any length in either English, German, or Bengali, I shall devote a central chapter of this book. There were also some associates of Rabindranath who became prominent within the circle to which the Geheebs belonged. Notably, this was the Gujarati danseuse Shrīmatī Hutheesing, who was a student in Sāntiniketan and later married a close relative of Rabindranath Tagore, thus becoming Shrīmatī Tagore. She spent time in Europe—at the Ecole d'Humanité among

other places—and later lived in Kolkata, where she hosted Edith Geheeb on her visit to the city in the winter of 1965–6.

The one Indian intellectual and associate of Rabindranath who dominates this web of contacts is Aurobindo Mohan Bose, a nephew of Jagadīs Chandra Bose, the famous botanist. Jagadīs was a friend of Rabindranath, while Aurobindo was among the very early students of Rabindranath's school in Sāntiniketan. Later, Aurobindo became a student in Cambridge and then in Germany. It was he who suggested and organized Rabindranath's visit to Paul Geheeb's Odenwaldschule in Germany in 1930. After World War II, he made the Ecole d'Humanité in Switzerland his home, where he died in 1977.

The Indian friends who Paul and Edith Geheeb had been cultivating went beyond Tagore's circle. A second, equally important centre of gravitation was the Rāmakrishna Mission. Edith Geheeb, especially, had been in contact with two prominent monks of the Rāmakrishna Order, namely Swāmī Nikhilānanda, who was based in New York, and Swāmī Yatīswarānanda, who for many years resided in Germany and near the end of his life returned to Belur Math, the Motherhouse of the order in the north of Kolkata. Edith Geheeb maintained a long correspondence with both swāmīs. Two German-speaking women who have translated the sayings of Srī Rāmakrishna and Swāmī Vivekānanda from English into German and published them were prominent members of the circle around the Geheebs: Emma von Pelet and especially Alwine von Keller who, for some decades, was a teacher of the Odenwaldschule and later moved to Ascona, Switzerland, where she became a student of the renowned psychoanalyst C.G. Jung.

There is yet another Indian influence which entered the life of the school. It was perhaps less consequential but important on account of the prominence of its actors. Jawaharlal Nehru was in contact with Paul Geheeb in Switzerland, and so were Indira Gandhi and her two sons, Rajiv and Sanjay, who spent a vacation in Geheeb's Ecole d'Humanité.

From the European side, the most remarkable and influential personality around Paul and Edith Geheeb was the French novelist and peace activist Romain Rolland, who kept up a voluminous and long correspondence with Paul Geheeb. Rolland was in touch with

many important Indian and European public intellectuals, spiritual personalities and politicians between the two World Wars. Prominent among them from India were Rabindranath Tagore and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Rolland's interest in India's spirituality is well known. He produced books on Srī Rāmakrishna, Swāmī Vivekānanda, and Mahātmā Gandhi. Not less influential within Geheeb's circle of correspondents were Albert Schweitzer, Hermann Hesse, Eduard Spranger, Béatrice Ensor (founder of the New School Movement), and several others who will be mentioned in the forthcoming pages.

This study has its focus on the area where the life of the Geheebs and their circle and the life of Rabindranath and his circle overlap. This is not a biography of Paul and Edith Geheeb, nor is it a history of the German or European New Education Movement. It is neither a comprehensive description of Rabindranath Tagore's educational principles nor a history of his school and university. This study is a comparison of these two educators and their schools in their respective countries. As we shall see, the histories of the Geheebs' schools and of the New Education Movement have been written mostly in German. There also exist in English detailed studies of Rabindranath's education and histories of his school and university. It would be preposterous to add to that. As little is written of Paul and Edith Geheeb in English, this comparison is also meant to bring before an English-speaking readership their personalities as well as their educational work, insofar as it is relevant for drawing and appreciating this comparison.

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Every research has its individual genesis. The more extensive the research becomes, the more intricate, life-influencing, and often life-changing it tends to become. I hold that especially in the humanities, the story behind one's research need not be kept hidden. Often, in imperceptible ways, it does influence the results of research. The story may generate a special interest in the researcher, in such a way that the research and the story behind it begin to intertwine and create their own version of the narrative.

I visited the Ecole d'Humanité in Hasliberg Goldern, Switzerland, while I was engaged in my research on Rabindranath

Tagore's relationship with German-speaking scholars, writers, and the German public in general. My initial book on the subject was *Rabindranath Tagore and Germany: A Documentation* (1991), researched and written on the invitation of the Goethe-Institut, Max Mueller Bhavan, Kolkata, to mark the fiftieth death anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore. It contains a brief chapter on Paul Geheeb.[3] Rather than bringing together a full-length description of Rabindranath's relationship with Germany, which would have taken several years to complete, I presented the most important documents surrounding this relationship in German and in English translation and supplied a comprehensive commentary as well as introductions and endnotes.

Supported by a three-month fellowship at the IIAS in 1995, I elaborated my research but I also narrowed the focus. I described the relationship Rabindranath enjoyed with four German intellectuals and personalities in public life—namely, his friend, the philosopher Hermann Keyserling; his publisher, Kurt Wolff; and his translator, Helene Meyer-Franck, and her husband, the scholar Heinrich Meyer-Benfey. These are, I claim, the four key relationships Rabindranath had with German-speaking persons. This resulted in the book *Rabindranath Tagore in Germany: Four Responses to a Cultural Icon* (1999).

I visited the Ecole d'Humanité on several occasions spread over a number of years. I became attracted to its ambience of youthful, positive thinking and to the energy and enthusiasm which both teachers and students brought to their educational ideals. Whenever I visited the Ecole, I spent long hours in its archive, which was lodged in Paul Geheeb's study (*Studierzimmer*) in the uppermost floor of the main building. Apparently, this study was left the way Paul Geheeb had used it. What did I see? On the wood-panelled walls hung several framed photographs. Noteworthy among them was a photo showing Paulus[4] and Rabindranath side by side; then the copy of a drawing of Rabindranath's face; and a photo of Paulus and Edith with Jawaharlal

[3] See Kämpchen, *Rabindranath Tagore and Germany*, pp. 97–101.

[4] This is the Latin version of 'Paul'. Paul Geheeb was generally referred to as Paulus by his friends, colleagues, and students.

Nehru. A small brass statue of the Buddha lent sanctity to the room. Among the several bookcases, I noted a full shelf of books on India: mostly Indian classics of philosophy in German as well as in English. I saw numerous books of Gandhi, then the Bhagavad Gita; I also found books on and by Swāmī Vivekānanda, Srī Rāmakrishna, and Rabindranath Tagore, and on the history of Indian philosophy.[5]

Surrounded by these pictures and books, Paul Geheeb sat and worked even at a time when his meetings with Rabindranath and Nehru had become distant history. I realized that his meeting with Rabindranath and the subsequent contacts with Indian personalities were not a mere episode in his life but had been of life-shaping significance.

I was introduced to the very well-maintained and rich archive of the Ecole by its then archival director, Armin Lüthi, and discovered, with surprise and joy, the wealth of relationships Paul and Edith Geheeb and their circle of friends had maintained with Indian and European personalities. Among Indians, there was not only Rabindranath Tagore but a number of other Indian personalities of note. Given a free hand by Armin Lüthi to copy any material I needed, I returned to the Ecole several times to complete surveying and collecting the India-related material. I also had long discussions with Armin in the years 1999 and 2000 which I draw on for this book. He had been the immediate successor of Paul and Edith Geheeb as the Ecole's head. To me, he became the important, authentic link to the founders. Armin Lüthi died on 10 September 2013 at a time when I happened to be present at the Ecole d'Humanité.

I had noticed the close connections the Ecole d'Humanité has maintained with India since its inception (but which I felt had become weaker of late). So, I suggested to the Ecole that I send one art student of the Santal tribal village Bishnubati (near Sāntiniketan) to them. I have been engaged in developmental work in the Santal villages Ghosaldanga and Bishnubati (located about 8 kms from Rabindranath's Sāntiniketan) since the mid-1980s. The Ecole kindly agreed, and I took Sanyasi Lohar to the school in 1998. He spent four months as an art teacher (1998–9) and then returned to complete his

[5] Elija Horn counted 143 books with Indian content, many of which, he writes, belonged to Edith (see Horn, *Indien als Erzieher*, p. 128).

diploma and post diploma courses at Visva-Bhārati's Kala Bhavan. He was so well appreciated in the Ecole that he was twice asked to return for another four months each time (in 2001–2 and 2005). Thereafter, Sanyasi started a family and got involved in his art classes at the Rolf Schoembs Vidyāshram, a Santal non-formal school near Bishnubati and Ghosaldanga. That is why he could not return to Switzerland more often to teach. Sanyasi Lohar is now the teacher-in-charge of the Rolf Schoembs Vidyāshram, which gives him the opportunity to apply the experience he gained in the Ecole d'Humanité. The contact with the Ecole d'Humanité continues to thrive. I last visited the school with Sanyasi Lohar in 2013.

During a visit, Armin Lüthi showed us a photo album of the school's early guests. To my surprise, there were photographs of Jawaharlal Nehru meeting Paul Geheeb, and of Nehru's grandchildren Rajiv and Sanjay Gandhi as young boys when they took a vacation at the Ecole. I asked for copies of these photographs which were later—through the then German Ambassador to India—presented to Rajiv and Sanjay's mother, Sonia Gandhi.

Armin Lüthi had a cardboard box in his possession, securely wrapped up with string, which he could not integrate into his archive because most of the material was in a script and language unknown to him—in Bengali. The box had been left behind by Aurobindo Bose when he died at the Ecole in 1977. Armin Lüthi suggested that I take over the box and use its contents in a way I deemed proper. He posted it to my German hometown, Boppard, in the Rhine Valley. The box contained a bundle of letters in Bengali as well as carbon copies of several essays. My surprise and excitement were not little when I discovered among these letters about a dozen which were handwritten by Rabindranath Tagore. Further, there were a few books and pamphlets autographed by the poet. The cardboard box turned out to be a treasure trove!

I translated the letters, determined their receiver (as not all were addressed to Aurobindo), and handed them over to the Deutsche Literaturarchiv (German Literature Archive) in Marbach (near Stuttgart, Germany) where they remain now. In 2011, they were exhibited during a two-day seminar called 'Rabindranath Tagore in Germany'. One sheet is on display in the permanent exhibition of the archive's Modern Literature Museum.

As a master's student of Indian philosophy in Madras (now Chennai) from 1976 to 1979, I happened to be introduced to a German woman residing in the city, Ellen Sharma, who was the founder of the Children's Garden School along with her south Indian husband, Venkatesh Narayana Sharma. I visited them rather frequently and admired Mrs Sharma's dedication to her educational task. At the time they housed numerous Tibetan children. This was many years before I had heard of Paul and Edith Geheeb and their educational ventures in Germany and Switzerland. Much later I began to understand that Venkatesh Narayana Sharma had been a teacher (*Mitarbeiter*) at the Odenwaldschule and that the Sharmas had been inspired by Paul Geheeb to found the Children's Garden School. At present the school is run by their two daughters.

The most dedicated historian of Paul and Edith Geheeb is Martin Näf, a blind scholar and a resident of Basel, Switzerland. Hearing that I had arrived at the Ecole from Sāntiniketan, he travelled up the mountains alone to talk to me about Rabindranath and Sāntiniketan. His epochal work *Paul und Edith Geheeb–Cassirer* (2006) appeared a few years thereafter. Several pages are devoted to a detailed assessment of the relationship of Geheeb with Rabindranath. Years later, Martin Näf, to my utter surprise, suddenly announced that he was on his way to India and would like to visit me at Sāntiniketan. Mostly unaccompanied and mostly choosing the land route, he travelled from Switzerland all the way to India—despite being blind! He spent about a week in Sāntiniketan and we met every day. The courage he showed was amazing. Later, he flew back to Europe.

Rabindranath Tagore Meets Paul and Edith Geheeb

India and Germany at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century

Rabindranath Tagore and Paul Geheeb continued with their pedagogical mission until their demise. Rabindranath lived in Sāntiniketan, among his students and teachers, until he died in 1941. Paul and Edith Geheeb, on the other hand, had to migrate to Switzerland in 1934 where they founded the Ecole d'Humanité, which in 1946 received its permanent place in the mountains of the Berner Oberland. This is where the Geheebs lived, directing the affairs of the 'Ecole' (as it is commonly called) until their death in 1961 and 1982 respectively.

Rabindranath's as well as Paul and Edith Geheeb's institutions were responses to the political and social situation in their geographical spaces. Hence, they both had the respect and admiration of those who considered these responses to be apt and necessary as well as the criticism and opposition of whoever thought these innovative schools were unnecessary or politically irritating. I shall sketch the social milieu within which these schools emerged so we understand the unique contribution they made in their time and geographic spaces.

When Rabindranath Tagore started his school in 1901, the Bengal society was under the lasting impact of the socioreligious reform movement called Bengal Renaissance. It was backward-looking in the sense that scholars and social activists tried to resurrect ancient Hindu culture in order to create a counterbalance to modern British-inspired education. At the same time, it was also forward-looking with its campaigns against the social ills of Indian society. The movement battling for political independence was still two decades away, M.K. Gandhi had not yet entered the scene; but Swāmī Vivekānanda had visited Chicago to give a fiery speech at the Parliament of Religions to assert himself as a votary of a peaceful, yet socially dynamic Hindu religion. The Hindu–Muslim divide was a thorn in the flesh of the nation, and no less of Bengal, after the British colonial rulers divided it in 1905 on religious lines into East and West Bengal. The majority of Muslims had not been keeping abreast of the Western-educated, city-bred elite, which deepened the communal gulf.

It is, briefly, against this background that Tagore's Brahmāchārya Āshram initiated its educational experiment in Sāntiniketan. Its origin is twofold: a private one and one grounded in the sociopolitical situation just sketched. Rabindranath's schooling in Kolkata was not a happy experience, which he vividly described in his *Jībansmriti* (*My Reminiscences*, 1912). Young Rabi was a lonely child who in his family and in the schools he attended had to struggle to receive affection and recognition. He intensely disliked the educational system adopted by the British colonizers which demanded dependence on schoolbooks and memorizing texts without fully understanding them. In the classroom, he felt shut out from the wide world around him, especially from the experience of nature. Rabi's father had to take him out from school and resort to homeschooling.

When Rabindranath Tagore, already appreciated as the foremost poet in Bengali, had to decide how to impart education to his own children, he moved to Sāntiniketan and began his school, initially, with five students, among them his son Rathindranath. Before that he had spent a decade at his family estate near the river Padmā supervising the tenants who tilled the Tagore family's fields. Yet, Rabindranth did more than just supervising their work and collecting their dues. This was the first time that he made an effort to impart education, and he learned what the pitfalls and intricacies involved in educating

others are. This held him in good stead when he started his school in Sāntiniketan.

The second motivation for starting the Brahmāchārya Āshram was Tagore's desire to contribute to national education by offering an alternative to the British system. This led him to search for the Indian roots of education. He found them in the ancient āshram schools which the epics, the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyana, describe in picturesque language. These informal schools, hidden away in sylvian woods, emerged around the various gurus and their families whose lives the epics describe. Rabindranath's poetic imagination perceived an education within natural surroundings and inspired by nature. The teachers should not merely transfer knowledge; they are meant to have the gift to motivate their students and be living examples of fully developed human beings to them. Rabindranath imagined children who have a natural inquisitiveness and an urge to understand the world and themselves. They just needed to be given the tools by the environment, by scripture, and by their teachers to be able to evolve their personalities.

This paradisiacal vision of education is at the origin of the ancient āshram schools, as interpreted by scripture, and is the inspiration of Rabindranath's own poet's school. As Rabindranath progressed in the experience of his pedagogical mission, his Sāntiniketan experiment became more and more also a political statement which was noticed with some suspicion by the British colonizers. After Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature (1913) and began his world trips to disseminate his message of East–West understanding and peace, he founded Visva-Bhāratī as a 'World University' (1921), which was dedicated to the dialogue of the cultures and religions of the world. Gradually, Rabindranth's Sāntiniketan became a hub of anti-colonial sentiments and activity in the cultural and social fields. Originally, Sāntiniketan was not moulded in this way; rather, as an āshram school and *tāpoban* (forest of ascetic practice), tucked away in an inaccessible area of Bengal, it was designed to stay away from the cross-currents of political and social life in order to give its students and teachers the opportunity of a free, unencumbered educational experience. But with Rabindranath Tagore in the lead, the school and university of Sāntiniketan became, in later years, a centre of political activity.

Paul and Edith Geheeb's Odenwaldschule, the first institution they founded, did not arise from a similar sociopolitical urgency. The desire to found the school was more personal and, as we shall see, arose from an existential need. Paul had already been teaching in several alternative school projects, which deepened his passion for the education of children according to innovative ideas. Paul and Edith had no children; hence, they were able to devote all their parental energies to the children of their school. The Reformpädagogik, that is the New Education Movement, had emerged as a force since the 1890s, and Paul Geheeb had first absorbed its ideas and then became a pioneer of the movement with his formulations of a new liberal education.[1]

When Paul Geheeb was born, in 1870, the German–French War was in progress, which the German army won a year later under Prussian King Wilhelm I. Otto von Bismarck (1815–1898) was in the process of uniting the different German states into one Reich (empire). In 1871, he became the chancellor of a united Germany. It became a constitutional monarchy under Wilhelm I, who was crowned the German Kaiser in Versailles (near Paris). For twenty years Bismarck was able to keep the Reich united and free from war by balancing the various tensions and divisions pre-existing in this new and unfamiliar construct of unity.

This was the period when the Industrial Revolution had its decisive breakthrough. Heavy industry was being established and infrastructural projects, such as street- and railway-networks, were being completed. Pre-industrial cities evolved into metropolitan cities to which working class families migrated, living in appalling shanty-town accommodations. Unemployment proliferated. The social climate was impregnated with insecurity, protest, unrest. Workers unions were being founded, but also being suppressed by politicians. Social democratic movements had great difficulty in persevering and translating their programmes into the party's political activity. Internationally, the Kaiserreich was able to maintain peace until the outbreak of World War I in 1914. Paul Geheeb grew up within this

[1] The innovative ideas Geheeb practised in his two schools will be described in Chapter 2.

turbulent social atmosphere and began building his vocation as an educator. At the time he founded the Odenwaldschule he was already forty years of age.

Geheeb's more serious challenges to his mission occurred later, that is during the time of the Weimar Republic between the two World Wars and during World War II. Political and economic hardships due to the inflation and devaluation of the German Mark starting in 1923, the subsequent economic crisis, and the rise of National Socialism shook the foundations of his institution, which he ultimately had to abandon in 1934. Paul and Edith Geheeb left with a small band of children to begin a new school in Switzerland.

Paul Geheeb—A Life for Education

Literature on Paul Geheeb in English is limited. Surprisingly, even the relevant studies on Tagore's educational experiment contribute nothing or little on Paul Geheeb. For example, the authoritative study by Kathleen O'Connell, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Poet as Educator* (2012), does not mention Paul Geheeb; neither does the major biography by Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man* (1995). Himangshu Bhushan Mukherjee's classic *Education for Fullness* (2017) is satisfied with two references on Geheeb. In Bangla, I discovered a few pages on Paul Geheeb in Samir Raychowdhury's essay 'Samadarsī cintā: bidese Rabīndrasikṣaṭattver prayog' (1987).

José Paz Rodriguez has published an essay in 2016 titled 'Tagore's Educational Model and Its Relation with the New School Movement'. But this essay is so full of generalities and mistakes that its factual content cannot be trusted. Unfortunately, the same is true of his essay of 2002, 'Tagore and His Relationship with the European New School Movement: Santiniketan, Odenwaldschule and Institution Libre de Ensenanza'. However, one essay included in a recently published English essay collection brought out in Germany does discuss the relationship between Tagore and Geheeb. This is Joachim Oesterheld's 'Tagore, Geheeb and Others: Indo-German Encounters in New Education during the First Half of the Twentieth Century' (2015). We shall return to this essay later.

Literature on Paul Geheeb is plentiful in German due to the chroniclers of the Reformpädagogik and Landerziehungsheim Movements

(rural boarding schools, foundations of the New Education Movement), the Odenwaldschule, and the Ecole d'Humanité. Martin Näf has written two voluminous, densely researched tomes on Paul and Edith Geheeb. They are *Paul Geheeb. Seine Entwicklung bis zur Gründung der Odenwaldschule* (1998) and *Paul und Edith Geheeb–Cassirer. Gründer der Odenwaldschule und der Ecole d'Humanité* (2006). The first book traces the biography of Paul Geheeb until the foundation of the Odenwaldschule in 1910; the second book has a wider focus, encompassing the full biographies of Paul and Edith Geheeb as well as the history of the Reformpädagogik from 1910 to 1961, the year of Paul Geheeb's death. A third, shorter, biography has been written by one of Geheeb's successors at the Odenwaldschule, Walter Schäfer. The title of this work is *Paul Geheeb. Mensch und Erzieher* (n.d.). They have made use of the archive at the Ecole d'Humanité and other German and Swiss published and unpublished sources. However, information in English on Paul and Edith Geheeb's lives, on their circle of associates, and on their pedagogical life–work is, as mentioned, extremely limited.

Another book, published while the writing of this manuscript was in progress, needs to be mentioned. It is *Indien als Erzieher. Orientalismus in der deutschen Reformpädagogik und Jugendbewegung 1918–1933* (2018) by Elija Horn. This wide-ranging study focuses on the multiple contacts the Reformpädagogik and the German Youth Movement had with India. It encompasses their histories not beyond 1933, that is, until the advent of Nazism. The book contains a few chapters relevant to our study of Geheeb's Odenwaldschule and its involvement with Indian visitors and with teachers interested in India. Elija Horn looks at the personalities of Paul and Edith Geheeb and their educational efforts more critically than my study wishes to do. While I mostly use sources close to and contemporary to the Geheebs, Horn prefers to rely on later academic studies. Even Paul Geheeb's contemporaries, as well as his colleagues and friends, have, as we shall see, not been sparing in their criticism of him, and this circle of critics includes his wife Edith. However, in order to maintain a proper balance, I have also added a few of the voices to which Horn's book gives room.

Paul Geheeb was born on 10 October 1870 in the small German town of Geisa. His father was a pharmacist by profession and a passionate botanist. Originally, Paul had wanted to follow his father's calling and pursue his studies in the natural sciences. His youth was

apparently sheltered, content—a positive experience. This created an *Urvertrauen* in him, a primeval trust in life and being, which became a pillar of his pedagogical intuitions. His mother's death when Paul was 14 years old, however, shattered him emotionally and gave him a sense of transience and evanescence. He often talked about 'catastrophe' being a constant feature in his life,[2] and catastrophes did visit him often, as we shall see. Figure 1.1 shows him in his early life.

Figure 1.1 Paul Geheeb in his early life
Source: CollMK.

[2] 'He always told me: "We live from one catastrophe to another"' (Edith Geheeb, 'Aus meinem Leben', p. 16). ['Er sagte zu mir immer: "Ich leb' von Katastrophe zur Katastrophe."']

Walter Schäfer points out that the social unrest of the time resulting in the transformation of an agrarian into an industrial society deeply influenced Paul Geheeb and created in him the urgent need for innovation in the field of education. Traditional value systems collapsed, new values had not yet emerged. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) was the philosopher who formulated and evoked the angst and insecurity of a new existential era. As a response, Paul Geheeb became a student of theology. Many of the early founders of the Landerziehungsheim were equally shaken by an existential insecurity which moved them to search for new visions of education to stabilize their society and themselves; many of them studied theology. Clearly, this was not in preparation for a profession, possibly to join the clergy, but to gain a solid philosophy of life (*Weltanschauung*).

Geheeb's second aim in the study of theology seems to have been to prepare himself for a life of service to society.[3] He also branched out into related academic subjects, namely into the study of philosophy, psychology, and, later, psychiatry. For ten long years Paul Geheeb studied at the universities of Gießen, Berlin, and Jena, completing his degrees in theology and philosophy in 1893 and 1899 respectively. University studies which are similarly broad-based and extensive are not rare in the German humanistic tradition. The classical ideal of education, derived from Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835), demanded that each individual must absorb the great mass of material information offered to them by the world around them, using all the possibilities of their receptivity; the person must then re-shape that material with all the energies at their disposal and internalize it so as to create a lively and harmonious interaction between one's own personality on the one hand and nature and society on the other.[4]

Fifty years ago when I was a student at a German Gymnasium,[5] we had to cover subjects in the humanities (modern and classical languages, geography, political science, history), the natural sciences (mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology), the arts (music, painting,

[3] See Schäfer, *Paul Geheeb*, pp. 13–14.

[4] Quoted from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilhelm_von_Humboldt. Retrieved on 28 September 2018.

[5] Starting with class 5, the German Gymnasium takes its students to class 14, after which the *Abitur* can be obtained.

art history, art appreciation), as well as physical sciences (gymnastics, games, athletic sports). When I completed Gymnasium at the age of 18, I had undergone studies and had been examined in not less than fourteen subjects. This expansive educational ideal—and his experience of it as a student—was the base for Geheeb's own educational praxis as the founder of two schools. As we shall see, he broadened the educational spectrum even further.

What a difference with Rabindranath Tagore's student career! He did not complete his schooling, he did not pass any final examination in India or in England, he merely enrolled for a few months at the University College in London. Rabindranath's pedagogical engagement was of the greatest importance to him; however, he did not practise it in isolation. For Rabindranath education was part of a holistic vision of how mankind should relate to the outside world, which included society, nature, the cosmos, and transcendence. Education for him meant leading young, sensitive minds towards this experience of connecting with the wealth and the variety of the world. His vocation as a poet, playwright, and intellectual was an element of this effort. Looking at Rabindranath's educational ideal from this perspective, it can be said to be even broader, even more inclusive than Geheeb's and von Humboldt's.

Paul Geheeb was an educator since the beginning, and he never attempted to be anything else. While still a student he was the private tutor of several pupils; in fact, he was a homeschooling tutor in several families to earn a living. Before he founded his own school in 1910, he worked as a full-time teacher in two alternative Landerziehungsheime. From April 1902, Paul Geheeb worked as a teacher in the Landerziehungsheim Haubinda (in Thuringia); in April 1904, he became its head. In June 1906, Geheeb left Haubinda due to differences with its founder, Hermann Lietz (1868–1919), who was one of the important founding fathers of the Landerziehungsheim Movement.

A few months later, in September 1906, Paul Geheeb and several other teachers who had left Haubinda with him, founded the Freie Schulgemeinde in Wickersdorf (Free School Commune of Wickersdorf in Thuringia). Here, too, Geheeb was not to stay long. Again, following differences with the head of the school, he was dismissed in February 1909. However, the school's curriculum

and general orientation prefigured Geheeb's own foundations, the Odenwaldschule and the Ecole d'Humanité. At Wickersdorf, emphasis was placed on music, the arts, and sports. Co-education, hitherto unknown, was introduced and students had a participatory role in the school management. These were revolutionary steps. These features would later be incorporated in Paul Geheeb's schools.

Paul Geheeb had to search for just a few months until he was given the opportunity to found his own school for which he alone would be responsible. He negotiated with several groups, including the Garden City of Hellerau near Dresden. Finally, the Archduke Ernst Ludwig of Hessen–Darmstadt permitted Geheeb to start a private school. The same Archduke, incidentally, would, in 1921, sponsor the Tagore Woche (Tagore Week) of the Schule der Weisheit (School of Wisdom). The philosopher and travel writer Hermann Keyserling had created this school in 1920 and had invited Rabindranath Tagore as its first guest speaker.[6]

The permission was granted. But how to begin? Paul Geheeb did not have the funds to buy several houses to accommodate a few dozen children and their teachers along with classrooms and space for other activities. To the rescue came Max Cassirer, Paul Geheeb's father-in-law, who bought a former inn at Oberhambach, not far from Heppenheim (in Hessen). The house was reconstructed to house about sixty pupils.

Paul Geheeb married twice. His first marriage did not last longer than a few months, after which the couple separated; they divorced later. The second marriage was successful. Edith Cassirer arrived in Wickersdorf as an intern, and soon Paul Geheeb, fifteen years older than Edith, asked her to marry him. After a brief courtship, they married in October 1909. Half a year later, in April 1910, Paul and Edith jointly founded the Odenwaldschule.

From then on, Paul Geheeb's biography became wedded to the 'biography' of this school—its growth, its ideals, its successes and problems, its ups and downs. Paul and Edith Geheeb guided the school's fate until 1934 in the idyllic natural surroundings of the Odenwald, removed from any town. This 'back to nature' ideal was also at the core of the vision the pioneer of the New School Movement,

[6] See Kämpchen, *Rabindranath Tagore in Germany*, pp. 11–57.

Hermann Lietz, entertained.[7] This call to return to a natural environment and to simplicity, to primary, direct experience can be seen as a backlash of industrialization and urbanization. They wanted to be removed from urban centres, yet not too far! Paul Geheeb wrote diplomatically, 'For economic as well as for educational reasons a modern school should be located in rural seclusion where the air is good and the landscape is beautiful. Yes, a valuable (*wertvolle*) town should be within easy reach so that its culture may be made fruitful for the education of the children and for the further development of the teachers.'[8] The nearest towns were Darmstadt and Heidelberg.

Rabindranath, too, wanted education to happen in a natural environment. Nature was meant to be a 'teacher', which the poet considered as important as human teachers. This was not a reaction so much to the overwhelming, disquieting qualities of the new city life which in India, a century ago, really had not yet come into its own. Rather, Sāntiniketan was intent on maintaining a direct participation in the natural cycles of pastoral life. In European urban culture, this participation in nature has had largely sentimental and romanticizing overtones. For the Sāntiniketan rural community, it was an existential need.

Paul Geheeb became a prominent member of the New Education Fellowship (NEF), an umbrella organization, founded in 1921 by British theosophist Béatrice Ensor (1885–1974) in support of the various new educational initiatives in Europe and North America. Between 1927 and 1936, Paul and Edith Geheeb attended its international conferences in Locarno (Switzerland), Helsingør (Denmark), Nizza (France), and in Cheltenham (England). In 1925, its conference took place in Heidelberg (Germany), not far from the Odenwaldschule, and approximately one hundred delegates went to visit it. Henry R. Cassirer commented: 'Open towards other civilizations, aware of his

[7] See Schäfer, *Paul Geheeb*, p. 24.

[8] Schäfer, *Paul Geheeb*, p. 33. ['Nicht nur aus wirtschaftlichen, sondern selbst aus pädagogischen Gründen sollte eine moderne Schule zwar in ländlicher Abgeschiedenheit, in gesunder Luft und schöner Landschaft, aber doch in erreichbarer Nähe einer wertvollen Stadt liegen, deren Kultur für die Erziehung der Kinder und für die Weiterbildung der Lehrer nutzbar gemacht werden kann.']

mission, Paulus was an enthusiastic member of the New Education Fellowship. This was a meeting place of the educational pioneers in Europe and America, a movement which was dynamically led by Béatrice Ensor. Her friendship and support were crucial and for Paulus it was without alternative.'[9]

It was at these conferences and within the orbit of the NEF that Paul Geheeb was first exposed to Indian educational thought. 'Right from the very beginning,' Joachim Oesterheld explains, 'in Calais in 1921 Indian educationists were participating in the NEF international conferences ... and India was represented in the NEF International Council temporarily by V.N. Sharma in 1927.'[10] At the Conference in Locarno (1927), the Geheebs 'met with some of Tagore's pupils and were impressed by the lecture of the famous plant physiologist Jagdish Chunder Bose [alias Jagadīs Chandra Bose].'[11] In the 1930s, the NEF founded centres in a number of Indian cities. In 1935, the Indian centres came together to establish the All India New Education Fellowship which elected Rabindranath Tagore as its president. Even then, Oesterheld calls the new education schools that came into being in India as 'isolated educational ventures'.[12]

Paul Geheeb had hoped to get support from the member schools of the New Education Fellowship when National Socialism began to rule Germany in 1933. He had no illusions—like many others—about the evil character of the new government. Edith Geheeb tells us how he once spoke out against the regime in front of all students and teachers of the school (*Schulgemeinde*). He was promptly reported to the local authorities by one of the teachers. Geheeb knew that weakening the school's ideals would not help it to survive; only the maintenance of these ideals would give the school a chance of survival.[13]

[9] See Henry R. Cassirer, *Und alles kam anders*, p. 35. ['Anderen Zivilisationen gegenüber offen und sich seiner Mission bewußt, war Paulus ein begeistertes Mitglied der New Education Fellowship. Dies war der Treffpunkt der pädagogischen Pioniere in Europa und Amerika, eine von Beatrice Ensor dynamisch geführte Bewegung. Ihre Freundschaft und Unterstützung war entscheidend und für Paulus unerläßlich.']

[10] Oesterheld, 'Tagore, Geheeb and Others', p. 44.

[11] Oesterheld, 'Tagore, Geheeb and Others', p. 45.

[12] Oesterheld, 'Tagore, Geheeb and Others', pp. 46–7; quote on p. 47.

[13] See Edith Geheeb, 'Aus meinem Leben', p. 29.

Three times the school was raided in March 1933 as the new government suspected the school of harbouring a secret cluster of communists. Assaults on Jewish teachers took place. After that, in April, Paul Geheeb was ordered to dismiss most of the teachers and to replace them by persons whom the government wanted to impose. Co-education, a concept dear to the Geheebs, had to be abandoned. A second director, who had the actual decision-making power, was assigned to assist Paul Geheeb.[14] As such disputes with the Nazi rulers continued, Paul and Edith arrived at the conviction that a compromise with them would distort the principles and the spirit of the school.[15] To their disappointment, the member schools of the NEF showed no inclination to protect them from Nazi incursions. The Cassirer family slipped into an uncontrolled fear about what to do next. The Geheebs decided to quietly prepare a peaceful transfer of the school to Switzerland. Paul Geheeb secretly travelled the length and breadth of Switzerland to find a new home for his school. Finally, the Institut Monnier in Pont–Céard near Versoix and in the vicinity of Geneva agreed to fuse with the pupils of the Odenwaldschule.[16]

In March 1934, the Odenwaldschule closed its doors. Paul and Edith Geheeb took twenty-five boys and girls and several teachers with them to Pont-Céard to the Institut Monnier. Due to the Great Depression which had swept the world economy, this institute had become almost depleted. With this a virtual odyssey began which lasted twelve years, until May 1946, when the school was able to move to its present location in Berner-Oberland, namely to the village Goldern in the Hasliberg region (see Figure 1.2). Before that happened, the school, with its founders and a few teachers, had to leave the Institut Monnier and settle in the Castle Greng near the Murtensee. Six months later, the group moved on to Schwarzsee where they first lodged in the Hôtel du Lac and later in the Chalet Aurore. During those years, World War II raged outside the Swiss borders. Refugees flooded the country as Switzerland remained strictly neutral; economic hardship was a constant companion. Several houses could not be heated in the winter at sub-zero

[14] See Bauschinger, *Die Cassirers*, p. 205.

[15] See Näf, *Paul und Edith Geheeb-Cassirer*, p. 799.

[16] See Bauschinger, *Die Cassirers*, p. 207.

Figure 1.2 Paul and Edith Geheeb in Hasliberg Goldern (1955)
Source: CollMK.

temperatures. Sometimes the number of students sank below ten. The Geheebs had to face the hostility of other private Swiss schools which considered Geheeb's school as competition that hurt them economically. It was only after the Swiss government began to support the school that it could blossom again.[17]

[17] See Näf, *Paul und Edith Geheeb-Cassirer*, p. 799.

Edith Geheeb has been outspoken about the hardships of these pre-war and war years. She called their life during these twelve years a 'continuous provisional arrangement, insecure, cast-out, frightening, threatened, afflicted by the deepest poverty'.[18] Financial worries never left them, nor the worry about how to provide the space to accommodate the children appropriately. Edith's memories recall unspeakable living conditions: 'Finally, we no longer had any space for these many children. The manner in which we have housed the children and how the children have lived and how the teachers have lived, that perhaps has not happened ever before.'[19]

After these many 'catastrophes', the school could gradually increase the number of students in Hasliberg Goldern. It had taken the name Ecole d'Humanité (School of Humanity). The name signals that the school grew to become more international. In Heppenheim, the Odenwaldschule had always welcomed children from different countries. However, in Switzerland, when numerous refugee children arrived to attend the school, its international involvement became a part of its carefully honed image. In 1934, Paul Geheeb delivered his famous, paradigmatic speech 'School of Mankind' (to which I shall return later).

Let us reflect on the enormous risks Paul and Edith Geheeb had taken upon themselves to maintain a school during this strife-torn era. It was an example of great courage. Without a government or an institution loyally supporting them, having to depend on sporadic private sponsorship and on well-wishers, the couple succeeded in upholding its ideals.

Rabindranath, too, had to struggle to finance his school and university. He had donated his entire Nobel Prize money to his educational institutions; he collected funds during his travels abroad where he pleaded with individuals and institutions to donate books and money for Visva-Bhāratī. Already advanced in age, he took a group of students

[18] Edith Geheeb, 'Aus meinem Leben', p. 31. ['Ein Leben in Provisorien, ungesichert, ausgesetzt, verängstigt, bedroht, in grösster Not.']

[19] Edith Geheeb, 'Aus meinem Leben', p. 34. ['Schliesslich aber hatten wir keinen Platz für die vielen Kinder mehr. Wie wir die Kinder untergebracht haben und wie die Kinder gelebt haben und wie die Lehrer gelebt haben, das gibt es vielleicht nicht zum zweiten Mal.']

outside Sāntiniketan to perform his dance-dramas. During World War II which unfolded outside India, and during the Independence struggle and its chaotic aftermath, Rabindranath was able to keep his institutions in Sāntiniketan open and running continuously.

Paul Geheeb remained the head of the Ecole until his death in 1961, at the age of 91. He shared this responsibility with his wife Edith who took over heading the Ecole after him.

Edith Geheeb, the Co-founder, and Her Circle

Reading about Edith Geheeb in the varied literature on Paul Geheeb creates a fair impression of her personality. Unpretentious and straightforward, practical and prudent in her day-to-day decisions, she was clearly an antipode to her husband. Or, putting it differently, he manifestly needed her talents to manage the everyday problems of their school. Although he was in the limelight and represented the Odenwaldschule and the Ecole for the wider public, he needed her to keep the boat of their school on an even keel. She was the motherly pole of the school to whom teachers and students alike came for advice, solutions, and consolation. This is how Sigrid Bauschinger characterizes the polarity of this couple:

> Edith often worked to the point of exhaustion and beyond which then required stays in hospital to recuperate. ... These spells of exhaustion were also caused by her complicated husband. After marriage, [Paul] Geheeb continued his headstrong, solitary life and, even right after marriage, cared, in Edith's words, 'damn little' about her.[20]

It occurs to me that this feminine or motherly pole was missing, perhaps sorely, in Rabindranath's Sāntiniketan. His wife Mrināliní Devī expired early, in 1902, a year after Rabindranath had made his transition to Sāntiniketan to found a school.

[20] Bauschinger, *Die Cassirers*, p. 190. ['Edith arbeitete oft bis zur Erschöpfung und darüber hinaus, was dann wiederum Erholungsaufenthalte im nahgelegenen Sanatorium von Dr. Rudolf Laudenheimer ins Alsbach notwendig machte. Hinter diesen Erschöpfungen stand aber auch ein schwieriger Mann. Geheeb führte nach der Heirat sein eigenwilliges, ja eigenbrötlerisches Leben weiter und kümmerte sich, in Ediths Worten, schon gleich nach der Hochzeit "verflucht wenig" um sie.']

Edith Geheeb was born in 1885 in Berlin as Edith Cassirer.[21] The Jewish family Cassirer, originally hailing from Silesia, was settled in Berlin. Edith's father, Max Cassirer, was a wealthy businessman. Together with several of his brothers, he traded in wood. They belonged to the well-to-do and cultivated upper class (Großbürgertum) of society. In their villa, the family was surrounded by numerous servants and employees. Their lifestyle included visits to the theatre and to concert halls as well as regular vacation trips to seaside resorts and other select destinations. Martin Näf confirms that the large and close-knit Cassirer family could be counted among the 'leading families of Berlin'[22] from around 1900 onwards.

It is noteworthy that the family, though it had become wealthy due to trade, was bent on getting a good education and on involving itself in scholarship and cultural affairs. That is how it produced numerous personalities who became well known and distinguished in their chosen fields. Among them was a philosopher, an art dealer, a publisher, a psychiatrist, a neurologist—all of them cousins of Edith Cassirer. Some of them became highly supportive of the Geheebs' educational efforts. Eva Cassirer, married to Kurt Cassirer, one of Edith's brothers, was, for long periods between 1915 and 1934, a teacher of German and of history at the Odenwaldschule. Her two sons, Thomas and Henry, spent most of their childhood at the school.

Eva and Henry Cassirer are excellent examples for us to appreciate the deep cultural importance the family enjoyed not in Berlin alone but on the national level. *Eva Cassirer* (1885–1974) remained Edith's life-long friend. With her husband, she spent many years in Rome; later, they escaped from the Nazi regime to England. Eva's prudence, sophistication, and generosity made her one of the important friends and benefactors of Rainer Maria Rilke, Germany's foremost poet of the twentieth century.[23]

Henry Cassirer (1911–2004), Eva's son, migrated to England in 1936 where he took up studies and later worked for the British Broadcasting

[21] For biographical data of Edith Geheeb's early life, see Näf, *Paul Geheeb*, pp. 361–81.

[22] Näf, *Paul Geheeb*, p. 365.

[23] Her correspondence with Rilke has been published (see Eva Cassirer, *Briefwechsel mit Rilke*).

Corporation. In 1940, he moved on to the USA and worked for television. Later, he was employed by the UNESCO and produced radio and television programmes for different countries, including India (which he visited in 1957).[24]

Edith Cassirer did not enjoy a good formal education, while many of her family's male members were highly educated. For girls to get well-educated was apparently not yet quite popular even in the socially progressive and liberal Cassirer family. She desperately wanted to escape from her milieu. 'I felt terribly unhappy in this setting, and I wanted by all means to get out of it.'[25]

She did attend courses to become a kindergarten teacher; however, she was not able to complete her training. As a girl of 17 or 18, she discovered her love for service to children. She helped in a crèche (*Kinderhort*); and she took up various small jobs supporting social issues. It is important to realize how she, still an immature girl, ploughed her own furrow opposing the established standards of her family.

This urge to work with children led her to become a trainee in the Landerziehungsheim of Wickersdorf at which Paul Geheeb was a teacher first and later its head. Her family was, at first, vehemently opposed to this move. Her father threatened to disinherit her.[26] She, however, persevered. When Edith was 85 years old, she had an extensive recorded conversation with three long-time and intimate friends—Armin Lüthi, Otto Kopp, and Aurobindo Bose. In this frank and freewheeling account of her life which was published virtually unedited, she tells of her disgust for the men she met—*had* to meet—during the formal evening gatherings in her parents' house. Several were interested in marrying her. But she refused them, because she first 'wanted to get to know life'.[27] At Wickersdorf she was meant to gather experience.

She joined Wickersdorf in early March 1908 and met Paul Geheeb. He fell in love with Edith and, very cautiously, wooed her. She said

[24] See Henry R. Cassirer, *Und alles kam anders*.

[25] Edith Geheeb, 'Aus meinem Leben', p. 7. ['ich fühlte mich furchtbar unglücklich in diesem Kreise,und ich wollte durchaus heraus.']

[26] See Edith Geheeb, 'Aus meinem Leben', p. 11.

[27] Edith Geheeb, 'Aus meinem Leben', p. 13. ['ich wollte doch vom Leben 'was erfahren']

later, 'He has really made an excessive effort to conquer me.'[28] But 'it was terribly hard for me to agree, terribly hard, he had to launch a huge struggle to win me over'.[29] After a short but vehement courtship, she finally yielded. In June of the same year, Paul Geheeb and Edith Cassirer got engaged.

At first Paul Geheeb was not accepted by the Cassirer family. Hailing from a lower class of society than Edith's, with barely a job or any career prospects, saddled with enormous debts, still struggling to find his feet in his profession as an educator, he was far from being an ideal son-in-law. Edith's resolute, convention-bashing nature helped her to accept her husband's unusual educational mission, and it provided him with the emotional support he so urgently needed. She did not have to wait for her family's support all that long either. Dressed in a borrowed suit, Paul went to meet Edith's father in Berlin. Max Cassirer interviewed and cross-examined him. Then and there, he repaid Paul Geheeb's debts. But permission to marry he gave only after a protracted tug-of-war lasting for two months. Surprisingly, Max Cassirer's main worry was whether Paul Geheeb had any hereditary disease,[30] not his lack of material and professional stability.

In that same year, in October 1909, Paul and Edith got married. Paul Geheeb's biographer, Walter Schäfer, commented: 'With her, Paul Geheeb found the partner who accepted him all his life and who made herself useful by service, but who also ruled by service.'[31]

Max Cassirer helped to find a suitable building, as mentioned, for what was to become the Odenwaldschule and paid for its reconstruction and renovation. A mere six months to the day after their marriage, the Odenwaldschule began its teaching routine. From then, Edith Geheeb's biography became inextricably linked to that of her husband's and to their school's destiny.

[28] Edith Geheeb, 'Aus meinem Leben', p. 15. ['Er hat sich wirklich die rasendste Mühe gegeben, um mich zu gewinnen.']

[29] Edith Geheeb, 'Aus meinem Leben', p. 15. ['Und ich hab' mich furchtbar schwer für ihn entschlossen, furchtbar schwer, er hat wahnsinnig um mich kämpfen müssen.']

[30] See Näf, *Paul Geheeb*, p. 382.

[31] Schäfer, *Paul Geheeb*, p. 31. ['In ihr fand Paul Geheeb den Partner, der ihn sein Leben lang gelten ließ—im Dienen wirkte, aber auch im Dienen herrschte.']

Paul and Edith Geheeb—Their Personalities

My attempt to throw some more light on the personalities of the two founders will rely on several quotes by them as well as about them which I have culled from reports by different persons who had been in direct contact with them. Paul Geheeb, with all his hard-fought success in life and his ultimate prominence in the field of education, had not been able to become a well-balanced, relaxed, and content human being. He probably never saw himself as the mature model of the free and self-assured person into which he wanted to mould young boys and girls through his education.

In a letter, written in 1929, Paul Geheeb admitted to his 'best friend'[32] and life-long confidant, Adolphe Ferrière, a co–founder and active exponent of the New Education Fellowship:

> Since my youth my life was, and it still is today, so unbearably hard and abnormally complicated that I cannot count on other people, not even on my close friends, to understand it. For me it is totally impossible to narrate it. So, I must expect and resign myself equanimously to the prospect that people will imagine rather strange things about me, especially after my death.[33]

Similarly, Rabindranath has been a restless and withdrawn person, although his public image differed. Rabindranath himself expressed dismay about his inability to have relaxed social relationships. Consider these lines in a letter to a female relative which the poet wrote at the age of 33:

> I feel ashamed to admit, and sad to think, that usually I feel very distressed with human company. I feel pain inside—every day I advise

[32] Edith Geheeb, 'Aus meinem Leben', p. 31. ['bester Freund']

[33] Letter by Paul Geheeb to Adolph Ferrière, dated 21 June 1929, from the Odenwaldschule (HLA HStAD O 37/995). This letter is also reproduced in Schäfer, *Paul Geheeb—Briefe*, p. 48. ['Mein Leben war seit meiner Jugend und ist noch heute so unerträglich schwer und so abnorm kompliziert, daß es nicht auf das Verständnis anderer Menschen, selbst meiner nächsten Freunde, rechnen kann; und mir ist es innerlich ganz unmöglich, es zu erzählen. Ich muss also darauf gefasst sein und mich gleichmütig damit abfinden, daß man, zumal nach meinemTode, sich recht merkwürdige Dinge über mich zusammenfantasiert.']

> myself to be like others, mix with people with ease, to enjoy life's pleasures with ease like others—but all along I have always had such a strange boundary which I have never been able to transgress. Among people I am like a new being, it has never been possible for me to connect with them completely. ... When I am so distant by nature, then naturally to be close just because of social norms is very strenuous for the mind. Yet to remain disconnected with people is not completely natural to me.

This quotation is taken from Sudhir Kakar's book *Young Tagore. The Making of a Genius* (2013). In this book the author also analyses Rabindranath's loneliness and spells of depression which made him withdraw periodically from society.[34]

Do these two quotations not appear similar?

Yet, Rabindranath, whom his students in Sāntiniketan called 'Gurudev', was seen—and revered—as an embodiment of the all-embracing education he himself propagated in his lectures and also translated into practice in his school and in Visva-Bhāratī, Sāntiniketan.

Likewise, Paul Geheeb became known as a teacher who was able to totally engage with an individual student and understand his or her situation.[35]

Henry Cassirer in his memoirs criticized Paul Geheeb's 'arrogance'. He related the following episode: Returning to his school from the New Education Foundation meeting in Denmark (1929), Paul Geheeb's

> eyes were aflame and his beard was blowing in the wind when he strode confidently through the school. 'The eyes of the world are turned towards you,' he announced to the Schulgemeinde [school assembly]. We are supposed to become the proof, the luminous example of the fruits which the new education can reap. I froze within myself faced by this overbearing arrogance. ... I was hardly able to tolerate the exaggerated claim of this missionary.[36]

[34] See Kakar, *Young Tagore*, p. 52.

[35] See Näf, *Paul Geheeb*, p. 250.

[36] Henry R. Cassirer, *Und alles kam anders*, p. 38. ['Als er in die Oso zurückkehrte(,) blitzte Feuer in seinen Augen, und sein Bart wehte im Wind, als er zuversichtlich durch die Schule schritt. ‚Die Augen der Welt sind auf euch gerichtet', verkündete er der versammelten Schulgemeinde. Wir sollten

Henry Cassirer recapitulated thus: 'Indeed, Paulus was a strange, strong-headed oddball with many weaknesses, and yet he proved to be a pioneer, whose work enjoys complete relevance until today.'[37] As we shall read later, a pillar of Paul Geheeb's education was his belief in the autonomy of students and teachers. Yet, his personality was so towering that 'practically no decision could be taken in the school assembly which did not receive his consent'.[38]

Armin Lüthi, Paul and Edith Geheeb's successor as head of the Ecole d'Humanité, was surprisingly critical of Paul in several long conversations I had with him. In January 1999, he alluded especially to Paul's vanity about the school, his possessiveness, and the unfair manner in which he often treated Edith.

A Dutch trainee who worked at the Odenwaldschule in 1930–31 summed up the general impression Paul Geheeb created without being judgmental and negative:

> With every word that I have praised the Odenwaldschule, I have praised Paulus because the school is his creation. Paulus, the person, is difficult to describe. ... He is so distant. ... Besides, I have never succeeded in getting somehow close to him. ... Paulus was far away. He hears you without listening. He sees you without looking at you. He is always kind and friendly, yes, very kind-hearted even, but he gives no replies. Is it absent-mindedness or highest wisdom? I mean, doesn't he reply on purpose so that I myself may find the solution to my problems?[39]

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der Beweis, das leuchtende Beispiel der Früchte der new education werden. Mir wurde kalt bei dieser überheblichen Arroganz. ... Ich konnte den übertriebenen Anspruch dieses Missionars schwer ertragen.']

[37] Henry R. Cassirer, *Und alles kam anders*, p. 38. ['Ja, Paulus war ein eigentümlicher, dünkelhafter Kauz mit vielen Schwächen, und doch erwies er sich als Pionier, dessen Werk bis heute volle Aktualität gewahrt hat.'] Paul Geheeb was universally called 'Paulus' (the Latin form of his name) in his school and by his admirers.

[38] Schäfer, *Paul Geheeb*, p. 49. ['daß es praktisch keinen Beschluß in der 'Schulgemeinde' gegeben hat, der nicht auch seine Billigung gefunden hätte.']

[39] Hamaker-Willink. 'Die gänzliche Verantwortung tragen', p. 557. ['Mit jedem Wort, womit ich die Odenwaldschule lobte, lobte ich Paulus, weil die Schule seine Schöpfung ist. Paulus in Person ist aber schwer zu beschreiben. ... Er ist so weit weg. ... Außerdem ist es mir nie gelungen, ihn irgendwie zu

It suited the hermitical inclinations of Paul Geheeb well that he shouldered the main burden of the enormous correspondence which he pursued for the sake of the school—with parents, students, former students, and other pedagogues. When he was on a journey, which happened frequently, he also regularly wrote to Edith. In Sigrid Bauschinger's observation, these letters were, throughout, loving and tender. This is true although, as hinted once before, their marriage was unconventional. Paul not infrequently and quite openly was involved in erotic affairs. Yet, Paulus and Edith stayed together because they belonged together. The major sacrifice for their marriage to succeed was, however, made by Edith. After almost fifty years of conjugal life, Edith wrote in a letter: 'Since I know Paulus, my life is no longer most important, but it is the fulfilment of his life's work.'[40]

It is an enigmatic image which emerges from these quotations by contemporaries. Unable to connect, yet yearning to do so; lonely and reticent, but yearning to be accepted and loved, perhaps especially by his students, Paulus was never quite the person he wanted himself to be. Edith Geheeb's conversation about her own life naturally contains numerous remarks about her husband. She felt that Paulus was deeply influenced by the many setbacks he had suffered—the 'catastrophes' he often referred to: 'Again and again he had to start anew.'[41] He was 'constantly depressed' fearing that he could not 'reach' [42] the children of his school.

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erreichen. ... Paulus war weit weg. Er hört, ohne zu hören. Er sieht einen an, ohne zu sehen. Er ist immer lieb und freundlich, ja sehr liebenswürdig sogar, aber er antwortet nicht. Ist das Geistesabwesenheit oder höchste Weisheit? Ich meine, antwortet er absichtlich nicht, damit ich selber zur Lösung meiner Schwierigkeiten käme?']

[40] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Hermann Burchardt, dated on 3 March 1958. Quoted in Bauschinger, *Die Cassirers*, p. 191. ['Seit ich Paulus kenne, ist nicht mehr mein Leben das Wichtigste, sondern die Durchführung seiner Lebensaufgabe.']

[41] Edith Geheeb, 'Aus meinem Leben', p. 24. ['immer wieder mußte er von neuem anfangen.']

[42] Edith Geheeb, 'Aus meinem Leben', p. 25. ['er könnte die Kinder nicht erreichen']

To conclude, I add two of Edith's remarks which will complement and balance the picture we have of Paulus so far. She pointed to Paulus' 'Christian background'—his adherence to 'the Bible, the New Testament', even though he spoke rarely about his religious belief.[43] The second remark comes at the end of the recorded conversation about her life. She emphasized that 'no matter how depressed he was and feared that he could no longer carry on', Paulus received 'great strength through nature'.[44] A pantheistic religious faith and a deep nature consciousness were apparently Paul Geheeb's main sources of strength which could fill him with satisfaction and allow him to bear the difficulties of life and the complexities of his personality. We shall see that these were exactly the same features which gave strength and consolation to Rabindranath Tagore as well.

Research conducted after Paul Geheeb's death confirms the complex, and sometimes negative, image that has emerged so far. Jürgen Oelkers assumes that Geheeb's methods of education relied on wielding power (*Herrschaft*) over children which would not even exclude subtle forms of violence.[45]

While describing Edith Geheeb's life and quoting from her utterances on Paul Geheeb, I have already said much which characterizes Edith Geheeb's personality. Later, when describing her relationship with her closest Indian friend, Aurobindo Bose, I shall have another occasion to portray her.

Reading her conversation with her friends and co-workers at the Ecole, I realize how grounded she was in reality, how 'hands-on' she reacted to each challenge, small or big, by offering practical solutions. These solutions could, as we see, often differ from Paulus' opinions. Take the example of whether or not to allow radio sets in the Odenwaldschule. In the beginning they were forbidden as an unwelcome influence from the outside world, but when they became

[43] Edith Geheeb, 'Aus meinem Leben', p. 25.

[44] Edith Geheeb, 'Aus meinem Leben', p. 36.

[45] See Oelkers, *Eros und Herrschaft*, pp. 181–3. On page 183, Oelkers writes, 'Tatsächlich ging es immer um Macht' (Indeed, domination was all-important.); Oelkers calls Geheeb's behaviour 'scheming' (*strategisches Verhalten*); he attributes to Geheeb 'internal distance' (*innere Distanz*) and 'emotional coldness' (*emotionale Kälte*) (see p. 182). The letters by Indian visitors to his schools and Geheeb's contemporaries whom I talked to do not corroborate such a negative image.

more commonplace the opinion was being discussed why a possible source of education and cultural enjoyment should be banned. Paulus was in favour of allowing radios. But Edith? 'A radio in the Oso? Impossible.'[46] Edith was in favour of making music oneself. But sooner or later, she felt, it would be impossible to avoid radios. 'Let us enjoy our peace in the few years that are left.'[47] Her attitude was practical as well as sagacious.

The two most perceptive, sensitive observations about Edith Geheeb that I could find in the scattered literature about the founders of the Odenwaldschule and the Ecole are from Agaath Hamaker-Willink, the young Dutch woman I have quoted before. She wrote that it was good to see

> with how much dedication Mrs Geheeb served tea [to her guests] and with how much care she tried to do everything right. She has an easy relationship with everyone. It must be a joy to hear how merrily she converses and how gaily the laughs; but there is a deep weariness in her eyes. Life here with so many people and the children and the many guests and, above all, with a famous husband around must be very tiring. Besides, I would not be surprised if *she* bears the lion's share of the work.[48]
>
> I always have the feeling: Paulus is the idea and Edith is the potentiality. ...
>
> Edith is the loneliest of us all. ... I always see her totally alone. Paulus has in her the most loyal collaborator, but is Paulus for her more than an ideal and the provider of a huge amount of work?[49]

[46] Henry R. Cassirer, *Und alles kam anders*, p. 32. ['Radio in der Oso? Ausgeschlossen.'] 'Oso' is an abbreviation of 'Odenwaldschule Oberhambach'.

[47] Henry R. Cassirer, *Und alles kam anders*, p. 32. ['Laßt uns doch die paar Jahre unsere Ruhe genießen!']

[48] Hamaker-Willink, 'Die gänzliche Verantwortung tragen', p. 525. ['zu sehen, mit wie vieler Hingebung Frau Geheeb die Tee servierte und sich Mühe gab, es jedem recht zu machen. Der Umgang mit jedermann geht ihr gut vonstatten und es würde erquickend sein, zu hören, wie lustig sie erzählt und wie fröhlich sie lacht, wenn sie nur nicht solche große Müdigkeit in den Augen hätte. Das Leben hier mit den vielen Menschen und Kindern und mit den vielen Gästen und vor allem mit dem berühmten Gatten wird wohl sehr ermüdend sein. Und außerdem würde es mich nicht wundern, wenn sie den größten Teil dieser Arbeit trüge.']

[49] Hamaker-Willink, 'Die gänzliche Verantwortung tragen', p. 558. ['Ich habe immer das Gefühl: Paulus ist die Idee und Edith die Möglichkeit. ...

This seems to indicate that the once fiercely independent girl Edith became immersed in the conventional role of a wife devotedly serving her husband, sharing his burden of work and responsibility while remaining uncomplaining and joyful. As mentioned earlier, it was she who balanced and steered—hardly noticed or noticeable—the affairs of their marriage and of the household.

Early Contacts with India

Walter Schäfer in his biography of Paul Geheeb remarked: 'Hardly any other country has attracted him by itself and because of its people more than India.'[50] The particular context in which Schäfer made this remark is when he mentioned Paulus being specially devoted to teaching the religions of the world. He wanted to introduce the children of his school to the plurality of religious teachings and practices. 'That brought Geheeb very close to the India of his time.'[51]

However, when we peruse the biographies of the two founders, it is clear that Edith's attachment to India, especially to India's religious life, is remarkably deeper than that of her husband. For her, the practice of and the emotional involvement with Indian spirituality became an existential need. Let us consider the following quote from Edith's recorded conversation:

> I myself have been brought up a Christian. I had Jewish parents who brought up their children as Christians. But I could not relate to Christianity really well, I mean to the Church. In fact, I received religious awareness only when I encountered things Indian. That actually happened when I got to know the Indian Swamis and their view of life. Then I felt a sense of belonging.[52]

Edith ist die Einsamste von uns allen. ... Ich sehe sie immer ganz allein. Paulus hat in ihr seine treueste Mitarbeiterin, aber hat sie in Paulus mehr als ein Ideal und mächtig viel Arbeit?']

[50] Schäfer, *Paul Geheeb*, p. 41. ['Kaum ein anderes Land ist ihm insgesamt und in seinen Menschen näher gerückt als Indien.']

[51] Schäfer, *Paul Geheeb*, p. 41. ['Das hat Geheeb ganz nahe an das Indien seiner Zeit geführt.']

[52] Edith Geheeb, 'Aus meinem Leben', p. 25. ['Ich selbst bin christlich erzogen worden. Ich hatte jüdische Eltern, die ihre Kinder christlich erzogen

Significantly, Edith Geheeb concluded the account of her life with this final statement:

> I have gone through many hard times, but I have experienced also moments of great happiness. A source of strength has been for me the encounter with Indian philosophy and with deeply religious Indian persons.[53]

Edith was not introduced to Indian spirituality early in her life, certainly not during her formative years. When Rabindranath visited the Odenwaldschule in 1930, Edith was already 45 years old and Paul 60. The cause of Edith's spiritual leaning towards India was not so much Rabindranath and his writings but rather was Srī Rāmakrishna, the Bengali worshipper of Goddess Kālī, the Rāmakrishna Order, and two of its prominent Swāmīs, Nikhilānanda and Yatīswarānanda.[54] These two monks entered Edith's life in the early 1930s.

In the 1920s and until 1934 when the Geheebs left Germany, the Indophile interests of the school increased. According to Elija Horn, until 1933, the school's journal, *Der Waldkauz*, published thirty-three articles on Indian themes.[55] In them, M.K. Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore were widely discussed. Visits by Indians also increased. Horn counts thirty-one Indian names in the visitors' book from the school's inception until its departure.[56]

A follower of M.K. Gandhi is recorded to have arrived at the Odenwaldschule as early as 1922. Kaushal Bhargava (1896–1974) was

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haben. Aber ich konnte mit dem Christentum auch nicht viel anfangen, also mit der Kirche mein' ich. Ich hab' eigentlich überhaupt erst ein religiöses Bewußtsein bekommen, als ich mit dem Indischen in Berührung gekommen bin. Nicht wahr, das war eigentlich, als ich die indischen Swamis kennenlernte und deren Lebensauffassung, dann hab' ich gefühlt, da gehör' ich eigentlich hin.']

[53] Edith Geheeb, 'Aus meinem Leben', pp. 25, 37. ['Ich habe viel Schweres, aber auch viel Beglückendes erlebt. Eine Kraftquelle war für mich die Begegnung mit der indischen Philosophie und mit tief religiösen indischen Menschen.']

[54] For the relationship of these two monks with Edith Geheeb, see Chapter 3.

[55] See Horn, *Indien als Erzieher*, p. 133.

[56] See Horn, *Indien als Erzieher*, p. 135.

'the first Indian, with whom we have been in close spiritual contact', wrote Edith Geheeb later. She, Paul, and Eva Cassirer considered the few days of his visit a special event.[57] In autumn 1927, Aurobindo Mohan Bose arrived. He stayed on with the Geheebs, with longer or shorter breaks, until his death exactly fifty years later. With the arrival of this student of Rabindranath from Sāntiniketan, 'India' had entered the life of the Odenwaldschule and the Ecole never to leave it again.[58]

Another Indian visitor who arrived in the summer of 1931 kept a steady, though less noticeable, contact with the Odenwaldschule and later with the Ecole. Again it was particularly Edith who maintained the correspondence. This was Anath Nath Basu (1900–1961) who was a teacher at Sāntiniketan and, having heard of the Odenwaldschule while in England, arrived in Germany for a visit of the famed school. Three decades later, Basu recorded his impressions:

> My first visit to Paul Geheeb in this school was a short one, but it was indeed a memorable experience. Even in that short time I could feel the spiritual kinship between Santiniketan and the Odenwaldschule as I could not fail to notice some of the remarkable features of Paul Geheeb's work—his intense belief in human freedom and his firm faith in the fellowship of Man irrespective of creed, colour or nationality. Tagore also firmly believed in the freedom of the child. Like the Odenwaldschule, Santiniketan is situated in the heart of the country, in the wide expanse of nature, where children lived in close companionship with teachers who themselves constantly strove for a richer and higher life, freed from the trammels of all narrow concepts of caste, creed or nationality. Like Tagore, Paul Geheeb, I could see, believed in the influence of nature on the child.[59]

A.N. Basu's somewhat pallid comparison between Sāntiniketan and the Odenwaldschule brings out nonetheless some salient common features. I shall take them up in Chapter 2. Basu kept in touch, he even spent a vacation with Edith in Saas-Fee. After World War II,

[57] Näf, *Paul und Edith Geheeb-Cassirer*, p. 273. ['der erste Inder, mit dem wir in naher, geistiger Berührung gestanden haben']

[58] For Aurobindo Bose's description of how he arrived at the Odenwaldschule, see the section titled 'The Meeting and Its Aftermath' in this chapter.

[59] Basu, A.N., *Erziehung zur Humanität*, p. 16. Originally in English.

his daughter Sunanda Basu taught for a while at the Ecole. However, unable to adjust to the cold climate, she left soon.[60] Until his death, Basu kept contact especially with Edith and met her often while on visits to Europe after World War II.

No influence on the school exerted another Indian visitor from Tagore's circle, Premchand Lal, who arrived towards the closure of Paul Geheeb's Odenwaldschule, in 1932, to spend a few days. He was responsibly involved in the rural reconstruction work conducted at Srīniketan, near Sāntiniketan. From 1922 to 1936 he served in various capacities. During the last few years of this period, he was in charge of the rural education programme at Sāntiniketan. He carried on a correspondence with Edith Geheeb for over thirty years. He often told her about his enormous difficulties and disillusion with rural uplift.[61]

Going back to Aurobindo Bose—consciously and partly unconsciously, Aurobindo was able to conjure the atmosphere and the ethos of a venerable, classical India. This image he created was not free from orientalist connotations; he, quite knowingly it appears, projected a romanticized India perhaps to elevate his own importance and find friendship.[62] This attitude of spiritual refinement made a noticeable impact on the Geheebs as much as on the students of the school who innocently absorbed it. Henry Cassirer wrote about the time he was a student:

> The Indians who visited the school impressed me and at the same time intimidated me. They were so sensitive, intellectual and deeply religious! For me they were strange people from another world. So I was totally unprepared to encounter the sturdy, merry people that I met when I visited India itself in 1957, their quick-witted humour and the amusing scenes I witnessed at the *All India Radio*, their vitality and earthiness.[63]

[60] See Näf, *Paul und Edith Geheeb-Cassirer*, p. 285.

[61] See Horn, *Indien als Erzieher*, pp. 146–8; see Neogy, *The Twin Dreams of Rabindranath Tagore*, pp. 115 and 210.

[62] To characterize this tendency, Elija Horn employs the interesting term 'Selbstorientalisierung' (a 'self-orientalising' tendency) (see Horn, *Indien als Erzieher*, p. 225).

[63] Henry R. Cassirer, *Und alles kam anders*, p. 34. ['Die Inder, die in die Schule kamen, beeindruckten mich und schüchterten mich ein. Sie waren so feinfühlig, intellektuell, tief religiös—für mich waren sie fremde Menschen

Almost simultaneously with Aurobindo another Indian arrived at the Odenwaldschule. She was Shrīmatī Hutheesing, a 24-year-old dancer born in Gujarat. She had, like Aurobindo, studied at Tagore's Sāntiniketan. In a letter to his friend Adolphe Ferrière, Paul Geheeb wrote in characteristically German orientalist fashion:

> For our school it was a great, blissful event that last autumn Dr Aurobindo Bose, a nephew of Sir Jagadis [Chandra] Bose of Calcutta, and the 24–year-old student Shrimati Hutheesing stayed with us for about one a half months. They revealed themselves as excellent, charming representatives of the highest Indian culture. ... So we were told a lot about Tagore's school, and the atmosphere of Tagore and Gandhi certainly contributed some precious elements to our community life. I so much hope that in the next few years we will connect with this Indian world more and more. Particularly so, as I am under the impression that human development there is ahead of us by thousands of years.[64]

And he concluded:

> These two young Indians helped me to get a much stronger and surely more correct picture of Tagore's personality than his trips through Europe had given to me.[65]

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aus einer anderen Welt. So war ich völlig unvorbereitet auf die kräftigen, fröhlichen Menschen, denen ich 1957 in Indien selbst begegnete, auf den schlagfertigen Humor und die lustigen Szenen bei All India Radio, auf ihre Vitalität und Erdverbundenheit.']

[64] Letter by Paul Geheeb to Adolphe Ferrière, dated 25 November 1927, from the Odenwaldschule (HLA HStAD O 37/995). ['Für unsere Schule war es ein grosses, beglückendes Erlebnis, dass im vergangenen Herbst etwa 1 ½ Monate Dr. Aurobindo Bose, ein Neffe des Sir Jagadis Bose aus Calcutta, und die 24 jährige Studentin Shrimati Hutheesing bei uns weilten und sich als ganz hervorragende, menschlich entzückende Vertreter höchster indischer Kultur offenbarten. ... So konnte man uns viel aus der Tagoreschule erzählen, und aus Tagores und Gandhis Atmosphäre drangen wohl wertvolle Elemente in unser Gemeinschaftsleben ein. Ich hoffe so sehr, dass wir in den nächsten Jahren in immer stärkeren Konnex mit dieser indischen Welt gelangen werden, zumal da ich unter dem Eindruck stehe, dass die menschliche Entwicklung dort uns um Jahrtausende voraus ist.']

[65] Letter by Paul Geheeb to Adolphe Ferrière, dated 25 November 1927, from the Odenwaldschule (HLA HStAD O 37/995). ['Durch diese beiden

Aurobindo Mohan Bose (1892–1977) was born in Kolkata. His father, Ananda Mohan Bose, had been the president of the Indian National Congress. His maternal uncle was Jagadis Chandra Bose, Rabindranath's friend and the physicist who became famous for his research in plant biology and radio communication. On Aurobindo, Ajit K. Neogy commented rather scathingly, 'The latter was brought up in excessive indulgence. He was so to speak a spoilt child.'[66] Aurobindo's education began in Sāntiniketan. From 1902 to 1907, he attended the Brahmāchārya Āshram and there he was under the tutelage of Rabindranath Tagore. He was one of the first students of the school that had been started only a year earlier (1901). Later, Aurobindo studied at Calcutta University, completing a master's degree in science, and at Cambridge, studying physics. During World War I, Aurobindo Bose was interned in Germany (1914–18). These biographical data are given in the 'Curriculum Vitae'[67] which he wrote in 1948. Aurobindo further noted that between 1922 and 1930 he attended the universities in London, Berlin, Heidelberg, Zürich, and Vienna. He studied physics, mathematics, philosophy, literature, politics, and did research in spectroscopy and radioactivity. Much later, he studied international affairs in Geneva (1936–7).

In a short essay which Aurobindo wrote for a *Festschrift* celebrating Paul Geheeb's 90th birthday, published in 1960, he gave additional biographical details. Here he mentions that he was 'the 12th boy to join' Rabindranath's school in Sāntiniketan. Then:

> I joined Cambridge University in October 1912, and came for my summer holiday to Heidelberg in July 1914—fourteen days before the outbreak of the First World War. I was in Heidelberg till autumn 1916, attending lectures in Physics ... and then went to Berlin to study Theoretical Physics under Professor Max Planck and also Professor Albert Einstein. After the end of the war I returned to Cambridge to finish my studies.

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jungen Inder habe ich auch ein viel stärkeres und wohl richtigeres Bild von der Persönlichkeit Tagores bekommen, als ich es durch seine Europareisen erhalten hatte.']

[66] Neogy, *The Twin Dream of Rabindranath Tagore*, p. 33.

[67] Bose, 'Curriculum Vitae' [two typed pages], dated 'April 1948' (CollMK).

There is no mention of his internment in Germany.[68]

Under the section 'Professional Career' of his 'Curriculum Vitae', Aurobindo Bose listed that he was a teacher at the Odenwaldschule and at Visva-Bhāratī where he lectured on 'European Politics' and German. Further he had served in the Indian Army (1940–5) and was a journalist accredited to the League of Nations. Apparently, he never received any permanent or long-term employment although both Rabindranath Tagore and Paul Geheeb wrote letters of recommendation. These biographical data hint at a man of wide interests and talents but also at a man of indecision and lack of focus.

Aurobindo enjoyed the special affection of Edith Geheeb, to whom he was deeply attached. Merely a few weeks after they first met at the school, Edith confessed in a letter to her husband:

> I shall always be available for Aurobindo whenever he needs me. I feel a great tenderness for this brown lad [*braunen Knaben*], who again is such a sensitive man—superior to me in many ways, in living a unified life, and then he is again so young in his pain and yearning that I for the first time feel like an ageing woman.[69]

This 'brown lad' was all of 35 years old at the time. Does this point to the motherly love of a woman aged 42 (who had no children) towards a man whom she did not want to grow up and who was himself content to remain a child? Hardly three months later, during the Christmas vacation of 1927–8, Edith Geheeb and Aurobindo Bose spent their 'first of many joint holidays'[70] in the Swiss mountains.

This somewhat tentative evaluation will be complemented and contextualized in Chapter 3 where I return to Aurobindo Bose's relationship with the Geheebs and their school after they shifted to Switzerland in 1934.

[68] Bose, 'Paulus', p. 24.

[69] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Paul Geheeb, dated 2 October 1927, from Ascona [Casa Angolo] (HLA HStAD O 37/1043). ['Für Aurobindo werde ich immer da sein, wenn er mich braucht. Eine grosse Zärtlichkeit fühle ich für diesen braunen Knaben, der doch wieder ein so zartfühlender Mann ist—in so vielem mir überlegen, in der Einheit des Lebens, und dann wieder so jung in Schmerz und Verlangen, dass ich mir zum ersten Mal als alternde Frau erscheine.']

[70] Näf, *Paul und Edith Geheeb-Cassirer*, p. 275. ['die ersten von vielen gemeinsam zugebrachten Ferien']

Shrīmatī Hutheesing (1903–1978) was born in Ahmedabad (Gujarat). She hailed from the Jain Hutheesing family, which has a renowned cultural and mercantile legacy in Gujarat. For one year she studied at Ahmedabad, after which, in 1921, she shifted to Sāntiniketan. She studied Sanskrit, Bengali literature, and, later, painting, music, and dance under the guidance of Rabindranath Tagore and the painter Nandalāl Bose. She became especially known as a singer of *Rabīndra Sangīt* (the corpus of Rabindranath Tagore's songs) and a dancer of Rabindranath's dance-dramas. In 1927, she went to Germany and studied pedagogy and philosophy with the renowned philosopher Eduard Spranger in Berlin. Spranger had close contacts with the Odenwaldschule. It was in the beginning of her spell in Germany that she visited the Odenwaldschule for two months and became acquainted with the Geheebs. This is also when she met Aurobindo Bose.

Due to her fragile health, Shrīmatī returned to India in 1930. For a few months, she acted as private secretary to Rabindranath Tagore and then again involved herself in singing and dancing. She became known for her interpretation of Rabindranath's songs and poems through spontaneous dance movements. Once she danced to the poet's own recitation of the poem 'Jhulan'. In January 1937, she married Saumyendranāth (or Soumyendranath, Soumya) Tagore, the grandson of Dwijendranath Tagore who was Rabindranath's eldest brother, and lived with her husband in Kolkata.[71] Shrīmatī's brother Raj N. Hutheesing married Krishna Nehru, the sister of Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister.

A few paragraphs on *Saumyendranāth Tagore* (1901–1974) are called for. The grand-nephew of Rabindranath grew up in Kolkata and graduated in economics from the elite-Presidency College in 1921. He became involved in radical leftist politics in spite of the objections of his family. He became acquainted with the revolutionary poet Kazi Nazrul Islam and the freedom fighter Manabendranāth Roy (M.N. Roy). He translated the *Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels into Bengali.

Saumyendranāth's father, dissatisfied with his son's penchant for leftist politics, sent him to Europe in 1927. There he, however, became

[71] Most of the information on Shrīmatī Hutheesing's life is culled from a typed undated 'Curriculum Vitae' (HLA HStAD O 37/992).

even more closely associated with the Communist Movement. He was arrested by the British and again by the Germans. Partly through Rabindranath's intervention, he was released soon. Saumyendranāth stayed in Europe until 1934 and returned to India to continue his struggle for the peasantry and other marginalized groups. In India, too, he was jailed for long periods. Upon his return, he founded the Communist League, which later evolved into the Revolutionary Communist Party of India. Rabindranath, though critical of his young relative, met Saumyendranāth in 1930 in Moscow when the former had gone to Russia to study its educational system.

Saumyendranāth wrote for European as well as Indian journals fiercely attacking German Fascism. Some of his articles, published between April and December 1933, were collected in his book titled *Hitlerism: The Aryan Rule in Germany*. In its Foreword, he explains:

> Being in Europe when Hitler['s] counter-revolution took place in Germany, I had the opportunity of studying the various aspects of Hitlerism from close quarters. My more than three years' stay in Germany and my more or less intimate knowledge of the political life of that country helped me considerably in understanding the hidden currents of the present Fascist regime in Germany.[72]

Rabindranath, the positive memories of his last visit to Germany in 1930 still lingering in his mind, was initially reluctant to condemn Nazi Germany outright. So, his firebrand relative wrote a strong letter demanding from him to act:

> You have expressed your opposition to Italian Fascism. If you have not changed your views, you cannot possibly support German Fascism, which is now being called Nazism. ... Wise men from all corners of the world have loudly voiced their views, only you have remained silent.[73]

Shrīmatī studied in Berlin a decade before meeting and marrying Saumyendranāth. The letters she wrote to Paul Geheeb and to Edith Geheeb often mentioned her husband, mainly his hectically active life as a politician and a social worker. She continuously worried

[72] Soumyendranath Tagore, *Hitlerism: The Aryan Rule in Germany*, n.p.

[73] Letter by Saumyendranath Tagore to Rabindranath Tagore, dated 1 November 1933 (quoted from Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man*, p. 344).

about his health, being herself frail in body and given to long bouts of bad health. However, Shrīmatī never went into the details of her husband's work and never seemed to be influenced, let alone carried away, by his revolutionary fervour. Shrīmatī very much remained the well-groomed, non-complaining Indian wife whose main concern remained the well-being of the family.

Later in his life, Saumyendranāth Tagore did visit Hasliberg Goldern with his wife, but it seems that Edith Geheeb only really got to know him when she was the couple's guest in Kolkata and Sāntiniketan in the winter of 1965–6. During those days, Edith highly praised Saumyendranāth's intelligence, temperament, and commitment in her letters. As we shall see, Edith however had twice the occasion to mildly scold him as well, something which she very rarely did.

Does this episode of Saumyendranāth's brush with Nazism belong to our discourse? Indeed, it does insofar as he belonged to the Tagore family and interacted with the poet; but also as the husband of Shrīmatī. However, although he stayed in Germany during the traumatic pre-war years, he had no acquaintance with the Odenwaldschule during that period and maintained a friendly distance to the Geheebs throughout.

Going back to 1927 and to Shrīmatī Hutheesing, Paul Geheeb and Shrīmatī seem to have discovered a deep affinity for each other. Following Indian custom, she called herself Paul Geheeb's 'daughter'. Her letters from Berlin are full of touching, childlike affection. Her frail health and her pangs of homesickness seem to have received a balance from Paulus' doting love. Soon she was at ease with writing and speaking in German. Charming is her complaint about German discipline; she wrote in not totally faultless German: 'Hier muss man arbeiten, arbeiten und immer arbeiten. Wenn man fängt an zu denken, dann ist er unglücklich. So ist das Leben in Berlin.'[74]

While Edith was vacationing with Aurobindo, Paulus and Shrīmatī stayed together in Tyrolia. Surrounded by an idyllic, fantastic (*großartig*) nature, Paulus wrote to Edith:

[74] Letter by Shrimati Hutheesing to Paul Geheeb, dated 28 March 1928, from Berlin (HLA HStAD O 37/992). [Here you must work, work and always work. If people start to think, they become unhappy. That is what life in Berlin is like.]

> Shrīmatī is radiantly happy. Every day, this really ingenious, so wonderfully deep human being brings me new revelations; for hours she speaks most passionately and opens up unimagined insights into the world of India to which I feel an ever stronger sense of belonging.[75]

Shrīmatī reciprocated the emotions of the man thirty-three years her senior, writing, 'Paulus—ought I thank you for your kindness? My Indian heart would not allow me to be so formal. It is happy beyond words for finding a loving father like you in this distant land.'[76] The letters that followed mention her illness and sadness at being bedridden for so long. She remained of indifferent health throughout her life; and her letters to Edith and Paul Geheeb would regularly express worry about some Indian family member being either sick or aged and in need of care.

In 1930, she had to interrupt her studies and she sent a farewell letter to Paulus full of regret and the hope to return to Germany soon to resume her studies. Paulus wrote her a glowing testimonial which was meant to help her to return to her studies. Here are a few sentences from it:

> I know her as an unusually gifted and sensitive personality of high moral character. Her nature is deeply religious and she has a strong philosophical bend of mind and distinct artistic abilities. She appears to me to be capable of the highest human evolvement and to be especially receptive for occidental culture. ... We shall be forever grateful to Shrīmatī Hutheesing especially for contributing to our knowledge of Indian spirituality and art.[77]

[75] Letter by Paul Geheeb to Edith Geheeb, dated 24 December 1927, from Tyrolia (HLA HStAD O 37/1043). ['Shr(imati) ist strahlend heiter; jeder Tag bringt mir neue Offenbarungen dieses wirklich genialen, ganz wundervoll reichen Menschen; stundenlang spricht sie mit grosser Leidenschaft und eröffnet mir ungeahnte Perspektiven in die indische Welt, für die ich ein immer stärkeres Heimatgefühl empfinde.']

[76] Letter by Shrimati Hutheesing to Paul Geheeb, dated 3 October 1927, from Berlin (HLA HStAD O 37/992).

[77] The testimonial is dated 29 July 1930 (HLA HStAD O 37/992). ['Ich kenne sie als eine ungewöhnlich begabte und fein veranlagte Persönlichkeit von hohem menschlichen Niveau. Eine tief religiöse Natur von starker philosophischer Veranlagung und ausgeprägt künstlerischen Neigungen, scheint sie mir höchster menschlicher Bildung fähig und besonders

In 1933, Shrīmatī wrote to Paulus about her involvement in Rabindranath Tagore's music and work. Her nonchalant absence of awe and hesitation to work with the world-famous poet is remarkable:

> I went to Darjeeling[,] a Himalayan hill Station. Tagore was there too. He stayed with us & we gave a dance-recital for helping Vishwa Bharati. Tagore reading his poems and I dancing. It was a great success. Then I was coming back home but Tagore's secretary was ill and he did not let me go. So I had to work for him. It was very interesting to be working for him.[78]

I shall revisit Shrīmatī and Saumyendranāth Tagore in Chapter 3 and follow up their relationship with Paul and Edith Geheeb before and during Edith Geheeb's sojourn to India in 1965–6.

In the early years of the Odenwaldschule, there was another strong Indian undercurrent activated not by Indian visitors but by two German women, spiritual seekers, who stayed in the Odenwaldschule—one as an 'old student', the other as a teacher. Emma von Pelet and Alwine von Keller had built up spiritual connections with India which they, in different ways, shared with the Odenwaldschule community. Both of them were not at home in the 'Tagore discourse' as were Aurobindo Bose and Shrīmatī Tagore. Instead they inhabited the discourse that was created by the Bengali mystic Srī Rāmakrishna (1836–1886) and his disciple Swāmī Vivekānanda (1863–1902) who founded the monastic Rāmakrishna Order, called the Rāmakrishna Mission. These two discourses—one rooted in literature and creativity in general, the other in spirituality and ascetic practices—overlap but slightly as Rabindranath and Vivekānanda, although contemporaries, never met. To this day their disciples and followers do not actively engage in probing what separates them and what could bring them together.

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empfänglich für die Kultur des Abendlandes zu sein; ... Was Shrimati Hutheesing uns aus indischer Kultur insbesondere aus indischer Religiosität und Kunst zu vermitteln vermocht hat, dafür weden wir uns ihr dauernd verpflichtet fühlen.']

[78] Letter by Shrimati Hutheesing to Paul Geheeb, dated 15 September 1933, from Ahmedabad (HLA HStAD O 37/992).

Martin Näf suggests that Srī Rāmakrishna and Swāmī Vivekānanda may not have been unknown names to Paul and Edith Geheeb even before Emma von Pelet and Alwine von Keller introduced their spiritual ideas to the school.[79] Paul Geheeb, the inveterate letter writer that he was, also pursued a correspondence with the French novelist and pacifist Romain Rolland (1866–1944) who had met Rabindranath Tagore, Kalidas Nag, and M.K. Gandhi, and who also enjoyed close bonds with Hermann Hesse, Stefan Zweig, and many of those intellectual activists who aspired for a renewed European culture based on intercultural and interreligious understanding, especially an understanding of the cultures and religious traditions of India and China.

It should be interjected here that Paul Geheeb had a craving for recognition, which is why he needed to be seen to be in contact with 'big names'. Later, he more than once called himself a 'friend of Tagore' to increase his reputation. In 1931, Paul Geheeb wanted to extend an invitation to M.K. Gandhi to visit the Odenwaldschule. Gandhi was then staying in London for the Second Round Table Conference. Paul Geheeb urged Edith to write a letter of invitation as her English was better than his. She, however, was reluctant. She wrote to Paulus (who at the time was on a visit to Switzerland):

> I actually do not quite see why you don't write the invitation yourself and send it to me for translation (and to get it typed as one cannot expect Gandhi to read handwritten letters). I am unwilling to invite Gandhi to us. I am too much under the impression that we do not deserve to have this extraordinary human being amongst us.[80]

Paul Geheeb continued to pursue his plan to invite Gandhi, who, indeed, agreed to visit Geheeb's 'Ashram':

> My first birthday joy was (day before yesterday in the evening) the letter from London: Gandhi's consent! ('would love to visit your Ashram').

[79] Näf, *Paul und Edith Geheeb-Cassirer*, p. 276.

[80] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Paul Geheeb, dated 24 September 1931, from the Odenwaldschule (HLA HStAD O 37/1046). ['Ich sehe eigentlich nicht recht ein, warum Du die Einladung nicht selbst schreibst und sie hierher zur Uebersetzung schickst (und zum Schreiben mit der Schreibmsschine, da man Gandhi wirklich keine handgeschriebenen Briefe zumuten kann). Ich selbst lade Gandhi ungern hierher ein; ich stehe zu sehr unter dem Eindruck, dass wir es nicht verdienen, diesen einzigen Menschen unter uns zu haben.']

> The date is of course totally uncertain still. I would, by the way, advise that G's visit be kept secret for the time being, also at the school.[81]

Paul dictated exact directions for Gandhi on how to reach first Rolland in Villeneuve and then his school. Edith was to translate them into English and send them to Gandhi.[82] The next day, Paul nervously gave instructions to Edith in case Gandhi would arrive suddenly while Paul was still in Switzerland.[83] In her response, Edith agreed with the arrangements Paul had proposed and, finally, even expressed her 'unspeakable' joy about Gandhi's consent to visit them.[84]

However, after almost two months of back-and-forth with several correspondents involved in organizing Gandhi's European trip, it was finally cancelled. All Gandhi was able to do was to visit Romain Rolland.[85]

In the late 1920s, it so happened that Rolland was working on his biographies of Srī Rāmakrishna and Swāmī Vivekānanda.[86] Around the same time, Emma von Pelet became interested in translating the words of Srī Rāmakrishna—to the extent they were already available in English—into German. When von Pelet read that Rolland was presently working on a biography of Rāmakrishna, she feared that her work might become redundant, since Rolland's future book would certainly be translated into German as well. Paul Geheeb contacted Romain Rolland on her behalf asking for advice.[87] Her book

[81] Letter by Paul Geheeb to Edith Geheeb, dated 11 October 1931, from Les Pléiades sur Blonay (HLA HStAD O 037 1046). ['Meine erste Geburtstagsfreude war (vorgestern Abend) Brief aus London: Gandhi's Zusage! ('would love to visit your Ashram'). Der Zeitpunkt ist natürlich noch ganz im unklaren. Ich würde trotzdem raten, G.'s Absicht vorläufig geheim zu halten, auch in der Schule.']

[82] See Letter by Paul Geheeb to Edith Geheeb, dated 14 October 1931, from Les Pléiades (HLA HStAD O 037 1046).

[83] See Letter by Paul Geheeb to Edith Geheeb, dated 15 October 1931, from Les Pléiades (HLA HStAD O 037 1046).

[84] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Edith Geheeb, dated 17 October 1931, from Odenwaldschule, Heppenheim (HLA HStAD O 037 1046).

[85] For a detailed description of Paul Geheeb's efforts to make M.K. Gandhi visit the Odenwaldschule, see Horn, *Indien als Erzieher*, pp. 154–7.

[86] Rolland, *Vie de Ramakrishna* (1929); *Vie de Vivekananda* (1930).

[87] See letter by Paul Geheeb to Romain Rolland, dated 4 May 1928, n.p. (HLA HStAD O 37/975).

was published subsequently as *Worte des Ramakrishna* (Words of Rāmakrishna, 1930) with an introduction by Romain Rolland.

Emma von Pelet (1892?–1967) had joined the Odenwaldschule in 1926 as a 34-year-old divorcée to study for her final high school examinations (Abitur) which she had missed taking in her youth. At the school she met Alwine von Keller who had been a teacher at the Odenwaldschule since 1916. She inspired Emma to study the works of Swāmī Vivekānanda and Srī Rāmakrishna. Emma stayed in contact with the Geheebs even after the school shifted to Switzerland. Emma herself moved to Switzerland, to Ascona where her address was 'Casa Shanti' (Shanti House), a pointer to her continued enthusiasm for India. She helped the school financially during the initial years of insecurity and hardship. Along with Alwine and Edith and Paul Geheeb, she was also in touch with the Swāmīs of the Rāmakrishna Mission when they visited Switzerland. Emma's collection of Srī Rāmakrishna's sayings was republished in 1966.[88] Her voluminous correspondence,[89] especially with Edith, tells us of the deep affection they felt for each other. In 1962, Emma wrote these lines to Edith which give a summary of her appreciation of their friendship: 'If there is anybody who ought to give thanks, it is me looking back at 35 years of friendship with Paulus and yourself. It was one of the greatest gifts that I was allowed to receive in my life.'[90]

The third woman of this circle of close friends was *Josephine MacLeod*, the American friend of Swāmī Vivekānanda who, after meeting the Swāmī, had dedicated her life to founding Vedānta Centres in the USA and in Europe and serving the poor while staying at Belur Math, the Motherhouse of the Rāmakrishna Order north of Kolkata. Josephine MacLeod became acquainted with Emma von Pelet and Alwine von Keller during one of her European tours; she spent a few

[88] See letter by Emma von Pelet to Edith Geheeb, dated 3 August 1966, from Casa Shanti, Ascona (HLA HStAD O 37/973).

[89] See HLA HStAD O 37/973.

[90] Letter by Emma von Pelet to Edith Geheeb of 20 March 1962, from Casa Shanti, Ascona (HLA HStAD O 37/973). ['Wenn jemand zu danken hat, so bin ich es im Rückblick auf die vergangene Zeit von mehr als 35 Jahren, in denen ich Paulus und Dir befreundet sein durfte. Es war eines der grössten Geschenke, die ich in meinem Leben empfangen durfte.']

days at the Odenwaldschule.[91] It was she who then invited Alwine von Keller to visit India. Alwine's trip to India took place in the winter of 1929–30. The most memorable period Alwine spent in India was with Josephine MacLeod at Belur Math as a guest of the Rāmakrishna Mission.[92]

Alwine von Keller grew up in New York as a child of German immigrants. Her father was a successful businessman and returned with his family when Alwine was 12 years old. In 1910, she began to live at an experimental settlement, the 'Garden City' Hellerau, near Dresden (which Tagore visited in 1930). She married twice, and both husbands died after brief illnesses. Alwine made Paul Geheeb's acquaintance long before the Odenwaldschule became a reality. Their correspondence began in 1896. In 1916, she shifted to the Odenwaldschule along with her daughter Ellen Teichmüller (from her first marriage) and her son Franz (from her second marriage). Alwine stayed on at the school as a teacher until it moved to Switzerland in 1934. In the course of a quarter of a century that she lived and taught at the school, her importance and influence increased steadily. Alwine von Keller studied Swāmī Vivekānanda's *Raja Yoga* and the *Yoga Sutras* of Patañjali. Her attraction to yoga, Indian spirituality, and Western esoteric literature goes back to the time before she joined Geheeb's school and developed further at the school. The teachers, students, and guests of the Odenwaldschule were the recipients of Alwine's enthusiasm for everything Indian.

Alwine later reported about her trip to the teachers and students of the Odenwaldschule. The school's monthly journal, *Der neue Waldkauz*, printed excerpts of her letters. Looking at them while keeping in mind the German romantic attachment to India as the 'cradle of humanity', her observations were cliché-ridden in their sentimentality. For example, in Belur Math she observed the sadhus of the Rāmakrishna Mission at their daily chores. Her comments were: 'Among them are very beautiful, astute, free, intelligent men, persons of really beautiful stature. Their conversations are free, inquisitive, lively. They are quite diverse, some really look distinguished, others

[91] For details on Alwine von Keller, see Horn, 'German Female New Educationists in India during the 1920s and 1930s', pp. 53–79.

[92] See Näf, *Paul und Edith Geheeb-Cassirer*, pp. 276–7.

are like flowers.' And she continued, 'But the atmosphere of the place is, despite its going and coming ... infused with such freedom and serenity that it is impossible to imagine how it could be expressed more perfectly within a community.' [93]

The pujas of the monks at the temple of Belur Math with their spiritually charged atmosphere especially attracted Alwine, and she found it hard to clothe her impressions into words: 'Again I witnessed a divine service, it is inexpressibly magical. Like a strange poem, like a Chinese painting that is both strange and magical. Every movement is full of love, piety, tenderness.'[94]

Even scenes which one would normally brand as repulsive and morbid in one's own country, for this German spectator they somehow assumed a different hue. This is how Alwine described a human corpse floating down the Ganges: 'Just now a small white human skeleton passes by, it rests lightly on the blue waters of the evening. ... It disturbs neither the bathers nor the [people in the] low-lying boats. Now some crows sit on it.'[95]

However, Alwine did not shut her eyes to the misery and poverty of everyday Indian life. In a letter published later, she wrote emphatically, 'As to the misery, it is terrible.'[96] She went on to describe with appreciation the social service work the monks of the Rāmakrishna

[93] von Keller, January 1930, 'Aus den Briefen Frau von Kellers aus Indien', p. 142. ['... es sind sehr schöne, kluge, freie intelligente Männer darunter, wirklich schöne Gestalten; ihr Gespräch ist frei, forschend, lebendig, wenn sie sprechen. Sie sind sehr verschieden, wirklich bedeutende Gestalten und ganz blumenhafte. Aber die Atmosphäre des Ortes ist bei vieler Bewegung ... von einer solchen Freiheit und Stille, wie man sie sich vollkommener in einer Gemeinschaft nicht denken kann'.]

[94] von Keller, January 1930, 'Aus den Briefen Frau von Kellers aus Indien', p. 142. ['Ich sah wieder einen Gottesdienst, von einem unbeschreiblichen Zauber—wie ein fremdes Gedicht, wie ein chinesisches Bild fremd und bezaubernd ist.']

[95] von Keller, January 1930, 'Aus den Briefen Frau von Kellers aus Indien', p. 142. ['Eben fliesst ein schmales, weisses Skelett (Mensch) hinunter, es liegt ganz leicht auf dem abendlich blauen Wasser; ... Es stört weder die Badenden, noch die ganz niedrigen Boote. Jetzt sitzen ein paar Raben drauf.']

[96] von Keller, February 1930, 'Aus den Briefen Frau von Kellers aus Indien', p. 11. ['Was die Not anbelangt, die ist furchtbar.']

Order were engaged in, and she did not exclude Christian missionaries from that praise. Enumerating the various social problems of the time, she concluded: 'All of this is of enormous complexity.'[97] This brings her to the opposite pole in her comprehension of India—first the admiration of romantic simplicity and beauty, now the realization of an intricately difficult country that cannot and must not be easily judged.

Alwine von Keller also described the Christmas celebration of 1929 at Belur Math, which is one of the observances of the Rāmakrishna Mission to this day. It is a mixture of British and Indian symbols, of Christian and Hindu practices. Alwine described the event minutely, without her previous gushing admiration.[98] Noticeable is Alwine von Keller's aesthetic attraction to India. Several times she mentioned the beauty of the people, also the physical beauty of the monks.

According to Elija Horn, Alwine von Keller also visited Sāntiniketan; however, nothing about this visit has been recorded.[99] She took along a colour film documentation on the Odenwaldschule and showed it to whichever group expressed an interest. It was screened in a Bombay cinema. Horn points to Alwine's weakness of 'exoticizing India as the Other'.[100]

Maybe her fusion—or confusion?—of the 'old, unblemished sacred India' and the 'real' India is best expressed in this one puzzling sentence: 'I see figures who I would not believe they exist if I were to see them on pictures!'[101] It is this blurring of the dividing line between reality and imagination, between yearning and its fulfilment, between beauty and its supernatural expression, the 'my' and the 'other' which summarizes Alwine von Keller's India.

She worshiped Paulus as a guru-like figure, a devotion which Paul Geheeb first accepted light-heartedly. The hero worship of several other female devotees contributed to this weakness. Also, Geheeb

[97] von Keller, February 1930, 'Aus den Briefen Frau von Kellers aus Indien', p. 11. ['Das alles ist von grosser Kompliziertheit.']

[98] See von Keller. 'Weihnachtsfeier in einem indischen Kloster', pp. 131–4.

[99] Horn, 'German Female New Educationists in India', p. 59.

[100] Horn, 'German Female New Educationists in India', p. 61.

[101] von Keller, January 1930. 'Aus Briefen Frau von Kellers aus Indien', p. 143. ['... das alte, unberührte heilige Indien. Da sind Gestalten, die ich nicht glauben würde, wenn ich sie im Bilde sähe!']

apparently loved playing either 'God' or the 'Kaiser' (Emperor) or 'Joseph' (the father of Jesus Christ) in the many theatrical productions put up at the Odenwaldschule.[102] In the time before World War II when hero worship of the fascist variety was a sign of the times, Paul Geheeb could have easily surrendered to these evil political winds. However, as Martin Näf confirms, that did not happen. Geheeb's ability to look at himself critically saved him.[103] Alwine von Keller developed from an uncritical devotee to Paul Geheeb's mature intellectual partner and 'one of the leading representatives' of the school.[104]

After 1934, she kept in touch with the Ecole d'Humanité and the Geheebs, although she no longer lived with them. In a new phase of her life, she was drawn to the pioneering psychoanalyst C.G. Jung; she took up residence in Ascona (Switzerland), and became Jung's student. She trained under him to become a psychoanalyst herself. In the 1940s and 1950s, Edith Geheeb took psychoanalytical treatment from Alwine von Keller. After World War II, Alwine also translated works of Sri Aurobindo (Ghose) and Swāmī Vivekānanda from English into German.

I have mentioned Alwine von Keller's daughter from her first marriage, *Ellen Teichmüller* (1898–1978). She studied at the Odenwaldschule, when her mother was a teacher there, as well as in several other schools. Thereafter, she was a student at the Universities of Berlin, Basel (Switzerland), and Münster and Kassel (Germany). Her subjects were wide-ranging—history, art, psychology, and education. She returned to the Odenwaldschule to take to teaching like her mother. This is when she met *Venkatesh Narayana Sharma* (1897–1986) who was born in Andhra Pradesh and studied in Madras where he became attracted to the ideas of theosophy. He was acquainted with Annie Besant of the Theosophical Society. After taking teacher's training, Sharma became a teacher at the Theosophical Society at Adyar in Madras. After some years, Sharma, planning to continue his studies in the USA, travelled as far as London, where he interrupted his journey. He received news of the Odenwaldschule and, being deeply interested in education, he proceeded to Germany to visit it.

[102] See Näf, *Paul und Edith Geheeb-Cassirer*, p. 208.

[103] See Näf, *Paul und Edith Geheeb-Cassirer*, p. 208.

[104] Näf, *Paul und Edith Geheeb-Cassirer*, p. 208.

His intended brief visit resulted in an employment at the school lasting four years (1930–4). He taught English and gave introductions to Sanskrit, Indian philosophy, and Indian culture to the senior students, his fellow teachers,[105] and especially to Edith Geheeb. Aurobindo Bose had been the first Indian to introduce India to the Odenwaldschule. With V.N. Sharma, a second Indian entered its sphere, and he resolutely connected the school with classical Indian thought and ethos After the Tagore and Rāmakrishna discourse, now theosophy entered the fabric of the Odenwaldschule.

Figure 1.3 Edith Geheeb and V.N. Sharma
Source: CollMK.

As before with Aurobindo, it was again Edith Geheeb who strongly responded to this offer to embrace the 'Indian' atmosphere created by the philosophically inclined Sharma. She participated in at least one of his courses and furthermore the two used quiet holidays to sit and read Indian scriptures together (Figure 1.3). 'How lovely is the world into which he leads me,' wrote Edith to Paulus at the end of 1931. 'When he begins chanting mantras in his

[105] See Näf, *Paul und Edith Geheeb-Cassirer*, p. 278.

soft voice, then it is as if I become engulfed in his world—the world of actual reality.'[106] The tone of Edith's description is strikingly similar to her reaction to Aurobindo Bose.

Sharma attended Heidelberg University studying Indology while remaining a teacher, and took his doctorate in March 1936 on a subject related to Indian education. This was the time when Alwine von Keller, the ardent Indophile, was teaching at the Odenwaldschule as well. M.S. Rajalakshmi, in her booklet on the life and work of the Sharmas, continues the story: Since Alwine von Keller 'was interested in Indian doctrines she had many books that were useful to Dr Sharma. Dr Sharma had gone to her house to find books[,] but he also found his future wife there.'[107] Sharma befriended Ellen Teichmüller in Alwine von Keller's house, and they married in April 1931.

Sharma rather uncritically idolized Paul Geheeb as a 'pilgrim' in the Indian mould. In an early letter, written in October 1931, Sharma first characterized the archetypical pilgrim like this:

> Real pilgrims, who have a real purpose in Life, will make it a point to know each other, talk with them [!], tell their experiences, narrate so many stories. In this friendship of the Road, there are no barriers, hindrances of Race, Country, and Nationality. The pilgrim never cares to think of this Man-made frontier. He thinks of the human soul, its travels and its expressions.

He adds some more sentences in this vein, until he reveals the true reason for this homage:

> My dear Paulus, you are such a pilgrim. [A] Pilgrim has no money, no riches, no attachments and no personal and private possessions. He has no place, no country, no race of his own. He is the citizen of

[106] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Paul Geheeb, dated 29 December 1931, from the Odenwaldschule (HLA HStAD O 37/1046). ['Wie schön ist die Welt, in die er mich führt. Wenn er mit sanfter Stimme anfängt(,) Mantras zu chanten—dann ist's, als wenn ich eingesponnen würde in seine Welt–die Welt der eigentlichen Realität.']

[107] Rajalakshmi, *Under the Banyan Tree*, n.p. The biodata of both Dr and Mrs Sharma have been culled from this booklet which relates the genesis of the Children's Garden School in Madras (Chennai), as well as from Näf, *Paul und Edith Geheeb-Cassirer*, pp. 277–80. The two authors differ in some cases in the years given; I have followed Martin Näf.

all lands, of all nationalities. There is no place where he cannot be seen.[108]

Sharma identified the Odenwaldschule as a 'Pilgrim Centre' which could become what it is only through many personal struggles and sacrifices. He gave a share of his praise to Edith Geheeb who 'like a true Indian wife' had participated in Paul's life's work. Finally, Sharma attributed to Paul Geheeb the qualities of a *sanyāsi*. In the Hindu tradition a sanyasi is a mendicant monk, personifying the most exalted stage in the spiritual development of a man or woman. 'Sanyasa is the highest stage we demand from the human soul. He is everything, all things are before him.' Sharma continued extolling the Indian ideal of Sanyāsa likening Paul Geheeb with it in the most exalted tones.[109] In doing so, Sharma presented a vision of Indian philosophy which was nebulously abstract and lacking in any defined substance.

Clearly, Paul Geheeb was reciprocally taken by Sharma's spirit. Essentializing each other in this manner answered to an emotional need which they both felt. How much this helped to analyse each other and understand what each one stood for is quite another matter. In Chapter 3, we shall see how Sharma revised his idolizing of Geheeb's school.

After the Odenwaldschule was abandoned in 1934, the Sharmas left for Jena where V.N. Sharma taught at the university for a year. But there was, ultimately, no place for the Sharmas in Nazi Germany. In autumn 1936, V.N. and Ellen Sharma left Europe and settled in Madras. After a year, in September 1937, they were able to found the Children's Garden School, following the models of the Odenwaldschule and Rabindranath Tagore's Brahmāchārya Āshram in Sāntiniketan.[110] 'Our Odenwaldschule in India' is how Ellen Sharma liked to describe their school in Madras.[111] The Sharmas maintained cordial contacts with the Geheebs throughout their life.

[108] Letter by V.N. Sharma to Paul Geheeb, dated 2[?] October 1931, from the Odenwaldschule, Heppenheim (HLA HStAD O 37/986). I thank Elija Horn for providing a copy of this letter to the archive on request.

[109] Letter by V.N. Sharma to Paul Geheeb, dated 2[?] October 1931, from the Odenwaldschule, Heppenheim (HLA HStAD O 37/986).

[110] See Henry R. Cassirer, *Und alles kam anders*, p. 35.

[111] Schäfer, *Paul Geheeb*, p. 41. ['unsere Odenwaldschule in Indien']

Rabindranath Tagore's Third Visit to Germany (1930)

Paul Geheeb made the acquaintance of Rabindranath Tagore as a poet first in 1917, three years after the German translations of his works had begun to appear. Martin Näf mentions that Geheeb's library keeps a book of Tagore's poetry in German translation which Geheeb, in his own handwriting, dated as 'Christmas 1917'. Tagore's fame in Germany increased steadily and erupted into stardom when he arrived for the first time in Germany in June 1921.

The one month that he toured the country, Rabindranath was feted and adored, discussed and listened to as probably no other poet or writer had been in Germany before. It was three years after the end of World War I, which Germany had lost and had left the German people humiliated and impoverished. Tagore must be seen as part of the national project of healing after World War I had inflicted deep wounds to the German psyche. By a section of society, he was revered as a 'messiah' who would redeem the German people in their crisis and offer them new cultural and spiritual values to live by.[112] Rabindranath arrived as a consoler and restorer of self-esteem and confidence. In his public lectures and addresses he, time and again, expressed his admiration for German culture and for the country's literature and art. He reminded his audiences of their rich heritage to which they should return (Figure 1.4).

While in Germany in 1921, Tagore also visited Darmstadt, which is in the vicinity of Heppenheim, near the seat of the Odenwaldschule. Tagore arrived as the guest of Count Hermann Keyserling, the famous German philosopher and aristocratic author of one of the most-read books published after World War I, *Travel Diary of a Philosopher* (*Reisetagebuch eines Philosophen*; 1919). Keyserling had, a year before, founded the Schule der Weisheit, the School of Wisdom, in Darmstadt, and Tagore was the first prominent guest to visit it and deliver lectures; his stay from 9 to 14 June became later famously called the 'Tagore Week'.[113]

[112] See Panesar, *Der Hunger nach dem Heiland*.

[113] For a description of the 'Tagore Week', see Kämpchen, *Rabindranath Tagore in Germany*, pp. 46–57.

Figure 1.4 Tagore speaks to a youth group in Germany (1930)
Source: CollMK.

One should have thought that Geheeb, being the expansive personality that he was, would have jumped at the opportunity to listen to the Indian poet and possibly even go and meet him. However, Martin Näf states that there is no evidence that Paul and Edith Geheeb went to Darmstadt to listen to and perhaps meet Rabindranath, or that Rabindranath came to pay a visit to the Odenwaldschule in 1921. The reason is seen in the animosity Geheeb felt towards the haughty Count and his high-sounding philosophy.[114]

In 1926, when Rabindranath Tagore revisited Germany, much of the Tagore '*Rummel*',[115] the craze about Tagore, had abated. This was partly due to the economic hardship that the German people were subjected to—galloping inflation and currency devaluation. Rabindranath's German publisher Kurt Wolff brought out the last Tagore title in 1925 and relinquished business in 1929. When

[114] See Kämpchen, *Rabindranath Tagore in Germany*, pp. 17–19.
[115] Kämpchen, *Rabindranath Tagore in Germany*, p. 57.

Rabindranath Tagore arrived for his third and final visit to Germany in 1930, the dark clouds of Fascism already loomed on the horizon. The Indian poet's star had waned. He did receive an enthusiastic welcome, but there was fear and uncertainty in the air.

In 1930, Rabindranath was almost 70 and carried his age on his stooped shoulders. Yet, he also looked at the world with refreshed energy. Why? In that year he revealed a new and unexpected side of himself—Rabindranath Tagore the painter. He had begun drawing and painting several years ago and had developed a passion for the visual arts. The pictures the poet produced were astonishingly, for many shockingly, non-traditional, unconventional, bizarre, and grotesque. These drawings arose from subconscious sources which nobody had suspected existed, least of all, perhaps, the poet himself. Yet, Rabindranath was eager to show that side of his creativity to the world. He brought his canvases first with him to Paris, Birmingham, London, and then to Berlin, Dresden, and Munich, and subsequently to other countries. The exhibitions he mounted in Germany received a mixed response and demonstrated perhaps how clueless the public was in its attempt to come to terms with Rabindranath's art. Were these paintings inspired by modern European art—by the Expressionists? Or did they, in some hidden way, rely on Indian traditions?[116]

Even though the 1930 visit to Germany was an anti-climax to the triumphs Rabindranath experienced in 1921, it was meaningful as he revealed new facets of his creative personality. Was it astonishing that Rabindranath, at this point in time, turned to the youth of Germany for carrying forward his message of peace and understanding among individuals and peoples? He saw the sombre political clouds and turned hopefully to the young generation. He visited two castles, Hohnstein near Dresden and Waldeck in the Hunsrück Hills near Koblenz, which were then centres of the German Youth Movement. The latter was a castle of the popular Nerother Wandervögel Movement. A group of them had visited Sāntiniketan the previous year and impressed the poet. Clearly, Rabindranath saw in the spirit of youth a hope for combating the menace of Fascism and National Socialism. Even though the visits of the castles and the

[116] For the German reaction to the exhibitions, see Kämpchen, 'Rabindranath Tagore's Paintings in Germany'.

Odenwaldschule are unconnected, it was a logical course of events for Rabindranath to visit the Odenwaldschule which could be seen as a beacon of all that was desirable for the future of Germany and of Europe.[117] Groups of Wandervögel did visit the Odenwaldschule feeling quite at home there, and not a few of its teachers were inspired by the Youth Movement.[118]

The Meeting and Its Aftermath

For the Odenwaldschule, Rabindranath Tagore's visit was an important event. It has been remembered and discussed in contemporary documents such as letters and articles and later in various memoirs. Armin Lüthi told me that Paul Geheeb liked to show off his acquaintance with Rabindranath Tagore and Jawaharlal Nehru even in the later decades of his life. This being so, it is surprising how little actually has emerged of the *content* of these interactions. However, the documents that are available, mostly preserved in the archive of the Ecole d'Humanité (and recently transferred to the Hessische Staatsarchiv in Darmstadt), are interesting enough to be quoted extensively. Aurobindo Mohan Bose was the mediator who made this meeting happen. Therefore, his account of how he first came to visit the Odenwaldschule and then requested Rabindranath to visit it will be presented first. Aurobindo wrote it down three decades later, in 1959, for the Festschrift dedicated to Paul Geheeb's 90th birthday.

> I had heard from many German friends of the famous Odenwaldschule and always wanted to visit it once. But this wish of mine could only be fulfilled in September 1927, when after spending the night in a Youth Hostel in Frankfurt a[m] M[ain], I with just a rucksack on my back, made my way to the Odenwaldschule. ... I came for [a] 2–3 days' stay, but remained there for at least three weeks I guess.
>
> I returned to London full of 'Begeisterung' [enthusiasm] for the 'Oso' [Odenwaldschule] and communicated this enthusiasm to my Gurudev (the revered Master) Rabindranath Tagore. From then on, I

[117] For a description of Tagore's three visits to Germany, see Kämpchen, 'Germany, Austria, Switzerland', in Kämpchen and Bangha (eds), *Rabindranath Tagore: One Hundred Years of Global Reception*, pp. 396–400.

[118] See Schäfer, *Paul Geheeb*, p. 50.

> gave him no peace, till he consented to visit the Odenwaldschule and come personally to know Paulus in July 1930.
>
> ... Why I was so keen for Tagore to meet Paulus, was the fact that both brought their offering of love and simple faith to the altar of the 'God of Humanity', that for both, their first loyalty was to that unique thing called the personality of man, and not to the State; that for both the heart of the child was the seat of that unique wonder where miracles happen every day! Tagore has written: 'Every child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged of man.' This is exactly what both these two great educators—one from the East, the other from the West—have felt so strongly: that the hope of the dream of a better world lies in the heart of the child.[119]

Aurobindo Bose was, however, not the person who introduced the Geheebs to Tagore and his circle. Martin Näf reports that Adolphe Ferrière had mentioned the Odenwaldschule to Rabindranath Tagore when the latter was a guest of Romain Rolland at Villeneuve on Lake Geneva in 1926.[120] By 1930, the Geheebs had established contact with Tagore, as becomes evident from a letter signed by Edith Geheeb, dated 1 October 1929, and addressed to Rabindranath Tagore. Edith wrote to introduce Alwine von Keller to the poet mentioning that she would visit India and would like to call on the poet in Sāntiniketan. Edith wrote in English: 'Since years we often think of you and your pedagogic work in India and we had already sometimes the pleasure of meeting people connected with that work here or elsewhere.'[121] She continued referring to Rathindranath Tagore and his wife whom she 'had the opportunity of seeing ... in London.'

Edith made a comparison which has been made often before and thereafter, namely, the Brahmāchārya Āshram at Sāntiniketan with the Odenwaldschule: 'We begin to see clearly that much of our work is already accomplished at Santiniketan. Mr. Geheeb and I therefore long for the opportunity of living for some time at Santiniketan without seeing any possibility of it.' At the conclusion of her letter, Edith

[119] Bose, Aurobindo Mohan, 'Paulus', pp. 25–6.

[120] See Näf, *Paul und Edith Cassirer-Geheeb*, p. 280. Näf refers to a letter by Adolphe Ferrière to Paul Geheeb, dated 28 July 1926.

[121] Typed letter by Edith Geheeb to Rabindranath Tagore, dated 1 October 1929, from the Odenwaldschule (HLA HStAD O 37/1130).

sends greetings to 'Mr Andrews' and to 'Dr Sen'[122] who, in other words, she had been acquainted with already.

Another reminder of contacts prior to Tagore's visit in 1930 is a short article by the Indologist of Prague University, Moriz Winternitz, who had met the poet first in Prague in 1921, then during his prolonged stay in Sāntiniketan (1922–3). In 1927, *Der neue Waldkauz* published Winternitz' description of the school at Sāntiniketan. Rich with details, this essay narrates the sequence of events of a typical school day. Winternitz projects a picture of discipline and spiritual tranquillity.[123]

Going back to the events of 1930, Rabindranath was accompanied by two private secretaries, Amiya C. Chakravarty and Aryanayākam, a Sri Lankan Christian of Tamilian origin. On 23 July 1930, Chakravarty wrote a letter to Paul Geheeb from Munich to confirm that this group of three would arrive from Marburg on 29 July. He added:

> We are all greatly looking forward to visiting your Institution which is so well known to all of us at Santiniketan. We hope and believe that the connection between the two institution[s] will be deepened and strengthened by this visit, and that the presence of Dr Tagore in your midst will be an occasion for real fellowship between the East & the West which we cherish in our hearts.'[124]

Although Amiya C. Chakravarty expressed his Rābīndric evocation of the unity of East and West in a formalistic way, it is significant that he expressed it at all, putting the Oderfwaldschule, of which he cannot have known many details, on a par with Sāntiniketan. A telegram followed this letter, confirming their imminent arrival.

The next document is Paul Geheeb's factual, sober report of the meeting and a detailed assessment of Tagore's personality. The report

[122] Charles Freer Andrews, the British friend of both M.K. Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore, and probably of Dr Dhirendra Mohan Sen, educationist and government official. He was principal and rector at Sāntiniketan from 1930–9 and secretary of education, Government of West Bengal from 1948–65.

[123] See Winternitz, 'Die Tagoreschule', pp. 106–07.

[124] Handwritten letter by Amiya C. Chakravarty to Paul Geheeb, dated 23 July 1930, from Hotel Marienbad, München [Munich] (HLA HStAD O 37/1130).

was published in *Der neue Waldkauz*. Here is an excerpt in English translation:

Rabindranath Tagore in the Odenwaldschule

[O]n the morning of 30th July, Tagore arrived at our home in order to take some rest for a few days between his lecture engagements. He knew that he would find our school nearly empty because our vacation had already started. Edith accommodated him in a nice flat at the Platon House where he also took his meals. He took his cup of tea as early as six o'clock in the morning; he proved to be of simple and unassuming habits. He only laid stress on his special need of an attached bathroom. He worked tirelessly from morning to night, and completed in these few days of his stay about eight paintings and wrote all kinds of texts.

I received Tagore at the railway station of Bensheim. The express train stopped for an unusually long time until the helpful train officials had moved out the many pieces of baggage which the Indians had arrived with. I looked into his marvellous, dark eyes which radiated an infinite majesty and benevolence and such humour. I then became aware that I was face to face with a truly great human being. This impression increased day by day when I started meeting him privately. Tagore is a completely universal spirit who is aware of the cultural development of the entire world. Surprisingly he is exactly and thoroughly informed of all activities, of all cultural currents and movements in America, England, France, and Germany. The way he comes to conclusions about men and things is evidence of the highest developed humanity. During personal interactions, he reveals an engaging kindness and a warm, tender cordiality. His mostly serene and benign face became overshadowed and took on the pained expression of distress whenever the possibility of a new European war was being mentioned. Elaborately and deeply moving, Tagore once explained how much, according to his conviction, Europe owed to the Jews. How poor would the Occident be of not only material goods but of the highest degree of humanity without such abundance of noble Jewish personalities! On several occasions he mentioned that since his childhood he evaded contact with all and sundry school masters.

Looking at how he approaches cultural problems, Tagore gives us the impression of a highly developed citizen of the world (*Weltbürger*). However, his idealism and his religiosity, in which he is totally immersed, show that he is deeply rooted in the Indian soil. 'We live

in the heart of eternity,'[125] he once said. He was highly impressed by our landscape and he felt that the atmosphere of our school was heart-warming. He and his companions felt a strong similarity between Santiniketan and the Odenwaldschule. Sometime after his visit he communicated this to us: 'The days spent in the Odenwaldschule, in the pure spiritual atmosphere of freedom and devoted service, have been the greatest experience to us during our tour in Europe.'[126]

[125] Originally in English.

[126] Paul Geheeb, 'Rabindranath Tagore in der Odenwaldschule', pp. 134–5. The last sentence is originally in English.

['Am Morgen des 30. Juli traf Tagore bei uns ein, um sich zwischen den Vortragsreisen einige Tage auszuruhen; er wußte, daß er unsere Schule fast leer finden würde, da unsere Ferien bereits begonnen hatten. Edith hatte ihm im Platonhaus eine hübsche Wohnung eingerichtet, in der er auch seine Mahlzeiten einnahm. Bereits um 6 Uhr morgens nahm er seinen Tee, erwies sich einfach und anspruchslos in seinen Lebensgewohnheiten, legte besonderen Wert auf ein Badezimmer. Von früh bis spät arbeitete er unermüdlich, vollendete in den wenigen Tagen seines Hierseins wohl acht Gemälde und schrieb allerlei.

Als ich Tagore am Bahnhof Bensheim empfing (der Schnellzug hielt ungewöhnlich lange, bis die hilfsbereiten Zugbeamten die vielen Gepäckstücke der Inder herausgereicht hatten) und in seine wunderbaren dunklen Augen blickte, die unendliche Hoheit und Güte und soviel Humor ausstrahlten: da wurde ich mir bewußt, es mit einem wahrhaft großen Menschen zu tun zu haben. Dieser Eindruck verstärkte sich mir, im intimen Zusammensein, von Tag zu Tag. Tagore ist ein ganz universeller Geist, der die Kulturentwicklung der ganzen Erde überblickt und über alle Vorgänge, alle geistigen Strömungen und Bewegungen in Amerika, in England, in Frankreich, Deutschland erstaunlich genau und gründlich orientiert ist. Wie er über Menschen und Dinge urteilt, das zeugt von höchst entwickelter Menschlichkeit; im persönlichen Verkehr zeigt er eine bezaubernde Liebenswürdigkeit und warme, zarte Herzlichkeit. Sein überwiegend heiteres, gütiges Gesicht verdüsterte sich jedesmal bis zum Ausdruck schmerzlicher Erschütterung, wenn von der Möglichkeit eines neuen europäischen Krieges die Rede war. Eingehend und tief ergreifend legte Tagore einmal dar, was, nach seiner Überzeugung, Europa den Juden zu verdanken habe. Wie arm wäre das Abendland, nicht etwa nur an materiellen Gütern, sondern an höchster Menschlichkeit, ohne jene Fülle edler jüdischer Persönlichkeiten! – Bei mehreren Gelegenheiten äußerte er, seit seiner Kindheit sei er allen Schulmeistern in weitem Bogen aus dem Weg gegangen.

Wenn Tagore so in seiner Einstellung zu den kulturellen Problemen den Eindruck eines höchst entwickelten Weltbürgers von universellster Bildung macht, so ist er, seinem Idealismus und seiner ihn ganz erfüllenden Religiosität

Paul Geheeb mentioned that Tagore 'worked tirelessly' while visiting the Odenwaldschule. What did he write? By inference, we can assume that he wrote the long poem 'The Child' which was inspired by the poet's visit, a few days earlier, to the Passionsspiele in the Bavarian village of Oberammergau. This is a long dramatization of the suffering and death ('passion') of Jesus Christ enacted by the lay actors of the village. In obedience to a vow taken in the seventeenth century, the village inhabitants enact the Passion Play every ten years. The manuscript of 'The Child' has been written on stationary of the Odenwaldschule.[127]

The dates of Rabindranath's stay are somewhat uncertain. A.C. Chakravarty's letter and his telegram mention 29 July as the proposed date of arrival, while Geheeb in his report writes 30 July. A sudden and last-minute change of plan is quite possible and would not be inconsistent with Rabindranath's style of travelling in Europe. Although 31 July was mentioned as the date of departure by A.C. Chakravarty, they actually stayed until 2 August. On this date the team took a car to Mainz (organized by the Geheebs) and then proceeded to the Rheinische Jugendburg Waldeck, a castle of the Youth Movement in the Hunsrück Hills[128] (Figure 1.5a).

That moment of departure has been captured in several photographs showing Rabindranath and Paulus standing side by side holding hands (Figure 1.6), a picture which reminds me of the poses

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nach, doch ganz im Boden Indiens verwurzelt. „We live in the heart of eternity', äußerte er einmal. Unsere Landschaft berührte ihn äußerst sympathisch, und die Atmosphäre unserer Schule heimelte ihn an; er und seine Begleiter empfanden eine starke Verwandtschaft zwischen Santiniketan und der Odenwaldschule. Einige Zeit nach seinem Besuch ließ er uns mitteilen: "The days spent in the Odenwaldschule, in the pure spiritual atmosphere of freedom und devoted service, have been the greatest experience to us during our tour in Europe."']

[127] Shailesh Parekh pointed this out to me. See http://bichitra.jdvu.ac.in/manuscript/manuscript_viewer.php?manid=665&mname=EMSF_002. Retrieved on 2 April 2019.

[128] See letter by Edith Geheeb to Mr Oelbermann of the Rheinische Jugendburg, dated 29 July 1930, from the Odenwaldschule (HLA HStAD O 37/1130).

Figure 1.5a Rabindranath leaving the Odenwaldschule (1930); a girl offers flowers
Source: CollMK.

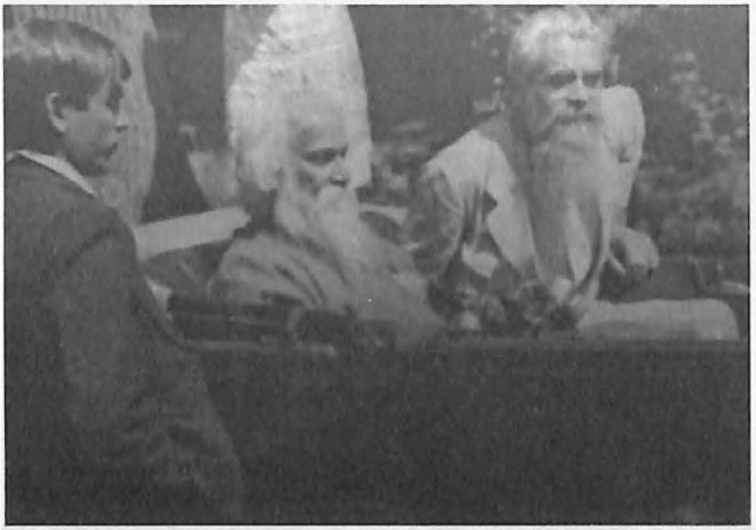

Figure 1.5b Rabindranath leaving the Odenwaldschule (1930); Rabindranath and Paul Geheeb sitting inside the car
Source: CollMK.

present-day politicians strike. Other iconic photos of this moment show the two standing near the car, or Rabindranth sitting inside the car, or receiving flowers of farewell from a girl with a small group of bystanders in the background. We can also see the two private secretaries in the background looking on and an Indian boy standing next to the car (Figure 1.5b). Was he Aurobindo? Was he V.N. Sharma? In 1930, Aurobindo was 38 years old and Sharma 33. The boy next to the poet does not look a day older than 20; so, who was he? Martin Näf reproduces one of these photos in his book *Paul und Edith Geheeb–Cassirer* (2006) with Rabindranath already sitting in the car, Paulus standing at the far side of it as if to pose for a final photograph, and the boy at the near side; but Näf does not identify him. The Souvenir of the Children's Garden School, brought out on their 70th anniversary in 2007, reproduces two of this series of photographs and the caption reads 'VN Sharma, Rabindranath Tagore and Paul Geheeb'.[129] This does, however, not remove my doubt.

[129] The Children's Garden Society School. *Let None Be Like Another*, p. 8.

Figure 1.6 The iconic photo of Tagore and Geheeb standing side by side
Source: CollMK.

The two central personalities standing next to each other in several photographs make an impressive picture indeed. The Indian in his customary dark, long gown, and the German in a comfortable jacket, in pants reaching just below his knees and his bare feet wearing sandals, they are indeed a study in contrast as to their sartorial choices. Paul's clothes look amusingly out of place next to the sombre attire of the Indian poet. He seems to have preferred a dress akin to that of the girls and boys of the Youth Movement. It is their equally long and white beards and their hands clasping each other which produce the sense of unity and harmony prevailing in the photograph (see Figure 1.6).

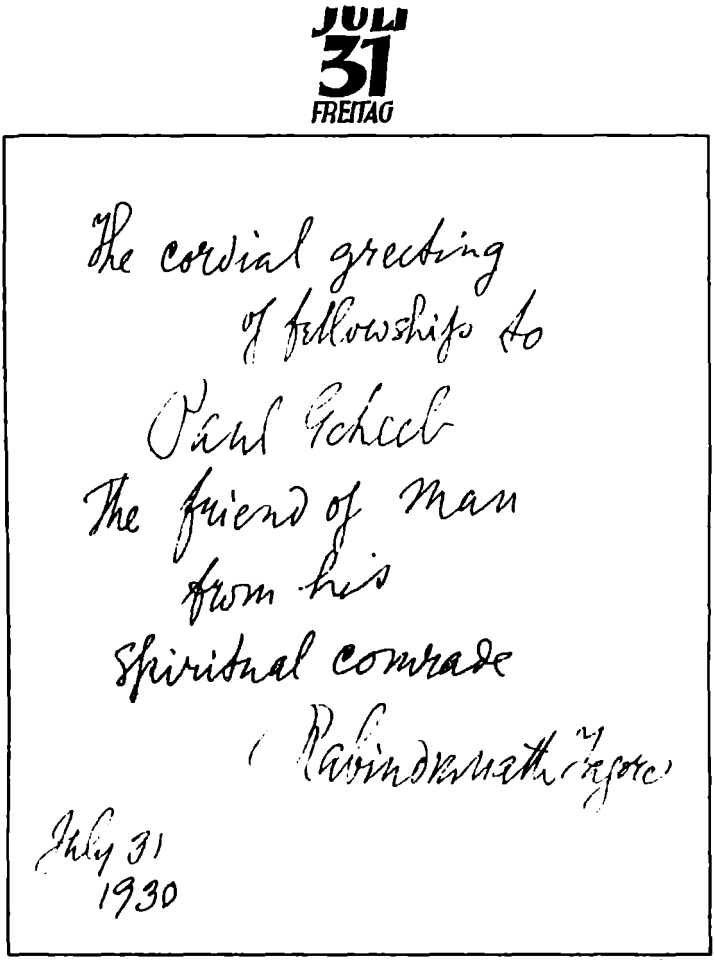

Figure 1.7 Tagore's farewell wishes to Geheeb at his departure in 1930
Source: CollMK.

Apparently, Paul had to depart immediately after Tagore and his entourage had left. From Neuchâtel, he wrote a letter to Edith which presents a more intimate view of the last day's meeting, which Edith could not witness as she, too, had left the school to travel to Berlin.

Neuchâtel, 3 August 1930

My beloved heart,

... The decision to postpone my departure by another day was not an easy one. Now, however, I am convinced that it was correct. What is more, being with Tagore yesterday was more meaningful than on any previous day. In the morning he remained seated at the breakfast table for almost two hours and spoke with extraordinary vitality and a wonderful loftiness of thought. By noon he became more and more intimate and cordial with me. His joviality was noticeably stimulated by the presence of a spirited young American ... with whom Tagore entered into a long discussion. The professor had arrived here on Thursday afternoon with Dr Mrs Selig from London (via Berlin). Ebbe[130] made a particularly strong impression on Tagore. I had asked her and her mother and Omusch[131] for tea on Thursday afternoon, and Ebbe alone for lunch yesterday. It was wonderful to see how quickly Tagore entered into contact with her and became immediately immersed in the deepest of problems; and how Ebbe suddenly overcame all her reservations about speaking English and became an extrovert. He has urged her to visit Santiniketan. During his days with us, Tagore painted several remarkable pictures and wrote a great deal. He was completely enthralled by his wonderful stay. Fortunately, even a blue sky opened up yesterday before noon. Immediately after lunch the Indians drove to Mainz in two Fetsch cars.[132]

[130] Freiin Elisabeth von Ketelhodt, a student at the Odenwaldschule.

[131] Emma von Witt, Ebbe's grandmother.

[132] Letter by Paul Geheeb to Edith Geheeb, dated 3 August 1930, from Neuchâtel (HLA HStAD O 37/1130). ['Mein geliebtes Herz, ... Der Entschluss, meine Abreise um einen weiteren Tag zu verschieben, ist mir nicht leicht geworden; nun aber bin ich überzeugt, dass er durchaus richtig war. Das Zusammensein mit Tagore war für mich auch an keinem der vorangegangenen Tage(n) so bedeutungsvoll, wie gestern. Morgens blieb er fast zwei Stunden am Frühstückstisch sitzen und sprach ausserordentlich lebhaft und von einer wundervollen Höhe; und mittags wurde er immer persönlicher und herzlicher zu mir. Seine Aufgeräumtheit wurde sichtlich gefördert durch die Anwesenheit eines geistvollen, jungen amerikanischen Professors ... mit dem Tagore in grosse Diskussionen kam; der Professor war am Donnerstagnachmittag mit Frau Dr. Selig aus London (über Berlin) bei uns eingetroffen. Besonders starken Eindruck auf Tagore hat Ebbe gemacht; ich hatte sie und ihre Mutter und Omusch am Donnerstagnachmittag zum Tee

What is surprising is that none of the Indian guests are being mentioned. Aurobindo Bose probably was absent from the school. But according to Martin Näf, V.N. Sharma and his future wife, Ellen Teichmüller, must have been staying at the school then.[133] And Ellen's mother, Alwine von Keller, had by all accounts returned from India. Why did she, the ardent Indophile who had wanted to meet Tagore at Sāntiniketan, miss this opportunity?

Before Rabindranath left, he, in big script, wrote these words on a calendar page: 'The cordial greetings of fellowship to Paul Geheeb, the friend of man from his spiritual comrade Rabindranath Tagore. July 31 1930' (Figure 1.7). The archive records twenty letters, postcards, telegrams, photos, and diverse memorabilia of Rabindranath. Among them are two picture postcards signed by A.C. Chakravarty. One was penned a month after their departure from the Odenwaldschule, that is, on 2 September, at Arley Castle (England). He noted, 'My mind is filled with abiding memories of the most delightful days spent with you.'[134] The second picture postcard was written on 15 September from Moscow. He observed, 'We are deeply enjoying the picturesque atmosphere of this city and are studying some of the tremendous social and educational experiments that are being made here.'[135] The meeting with Rabindranath over and suitably recorded and remembered, the question that must have occurred was whether

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gebeten, Ebbe allein gestern noch zum Mittagessen. Es war wunderbar, wie rasch Tagore Kontakt mit ihr fand und schnell in den tiefsten Problemen war, – und wie Ebbe alle Scheu vor dem Englischsprechen plötzlich überwunden hatte und aus sich heraus ging; er hat sie sehr dringend nach Santiniketan eingeladen. In den Tagen bei uns hat Tagore mehrere merkwürdige Bilder gemalt und viel geschrieben. Er war ganz beglückt von seinem wunderschönen Aufenthalt. Glücklicherweise erstrahlte gestern Vormittag auch noch der blaue Himmel über uns. Direkt nach dem Mittagessen fuhren die Inder in zwei Fetsch–Autos nach Mainz ab.']

[133] Näf, *Paul und Edith Geheeb-Cassirer*, p. 278 mentions that Sharma arrived at the Odenwaldschule in the 'beginning of 1930'.

[134] Picture postcard by A.C. Chakravarty to 'Dear & Respected friends', dated 2 September 1930, from Arley Castle (HLA HStAD O 37/1130).

[135] Picture postcard by A.C. Chakravarty to 'Dear & Respected Friends', dated 15 September 1930, from Moscow (HLA HStAD O 37/1130).

Rabindranath's visit to the Odenwaldschule had a tangible impact or any consequences in that school or later in the Ecole d'Humanité in Switzerland. Let me give a quotation by Martin Näf, who struggled to give a nuanced response:

> Whatever he [Paul Geheeb] is able to tell about Tagore remains rather cliché-ridden (*schablonenhaft*). It appears as if the actual encounter had happened on an altogether different plane. Only the reference to the topics of war and anti-Semitism transcend somewhat the conventional and the clichéd.[136]
>
> As mentioned, it is not easy to decide whether the exchange of niceties around this visit was more than a mutual PR exercise or whether it was a ritual ego boost, or whether what happened was indeed an encounter, a meeting of minds.[137]

Hilariously, Näf referred to 'some irreverent observers' who had the suspicion that 'the two celebrities ... were mainly troubled by the question: which of the two had the most splendid beard'. But, on a serious note, according to Näf, two factors speak in favour of an encounter which for both personalities had a 'deep personal significance'. One, Tagore represented a cultural and religious tradition which Geheeb could well identify with. Two, the educational ideals of the two persons were similar to the point of 'overlapping' (*deckungsgleich*). The author very briefly outlined the broad similarities of the two non-conventional systems of education, remarking that Tagore was considerably sterner in his criticism of conventional education than Geheeb. Näf concludes with this significant interpretation:

[136] The author refers to Paul Geheeb's report published in *Der neue Waldkauz*, reproduced earlier.

[137] Näf, *Paul und Edith Geheeb-Cassirer*, pp. 281–2. ['...was er zu Tagore zu sagen vermag (bleibt) relativ schablonenhaft–ganz so, als ob die eigentliche Begegnung auf einer ganz anderen Ebene stattgefunden hätte. Einzig die Hinweise auf das Thema Krieg und Antisemitismus gehen ein wenig über dieses konventionell Schablonenmässige hinaus. ... Es ist, wie gesagt, nicht leicht zu entscheiden, ob es bei den rund um diesen Besuch ausgetauschten Freundlichkeiten nur um eine wechselseitige PR Aktion oder um eine rituelle Selbstbestätigung ging, oder ob hier wirklich eine Begegnung, eine innere Berührung stattfand.']

> The Odenwaldschule and Tagore's foundation, which are so far away from each other, are in a way the expression of a deep communality (*Gemeinsamkeit*) of emotion and thought, stripped of all cultural differences. Tagore's language was different from Geheeb's, it was freer, more radical, more emotional. But Tagore's yearning for a world beyond the constraints of civilization and for a liberated education ... is possibly more akin to Geheeb than any other educator whom Geheeb met in the course of his life.[138]

Elija Horn arrives at the slightly more critical conclusion that, according to the sources available, it may be assumed that no exchange specifically on education took place between the two men. Did Geheeb, Horn asks, at all inform himself about Tagore's pedagogical concept in Sāntiniketan? Paul Geheeb apparently shied away from detailed discussions about the praxis of education.[139] Yet, in response I ask, have the many visitors from Sāntiniketan not related their experiences in Tagore's school to the Geheebs? Through them, they should have received a fair idea of Tagore's educational concept as well as of the problems it involves.

A year later, in 1931, Paul Geheeb had the opportunity to spell out his respect for Tagore to a wider public when he was requested to contribute to *The Golden Book of Tagore* (1931), which was published in honour of his 70th birthday. Geheeb offered a German text full of lofty, solemn language of a kind he is not known to have used generally. He wrote that Tagore had been known to him as a poet and ingenious educator, but when Geheeb had the 'blissful luck' (*beseligende Glück*) to meet Tagore last year, he discovered that he was 'one of the greatest wise men of all times and of all peoples' (*einer der grössten Weisen aller Zeiten und Völker*) and the 'only personality of modern times who can

[138] Näf, *Paul und Edith Geheeb-Cassirer*, p. 282. ['Die Odenwaldschule und die räumlich so weit entfernte Gründung Tagores sind so gesehen der Ausdruck einer tiefen, von allen kulturellen Unterschieden unabhängigen Gemeinsamkeit im Fühlen und Denken. Tagores Sprache war anders als diejenige Geheebs—ungebundener, radikaler, gefühlvoller. Aber in seiner Sehnsucht nach einer Welt jenseits der Zwänge der Zivilisation und einer von der Pädagogik befreiten Erziehung ... steht Tagore Geheeb vielleicht näher als alle anderen Erzieher, mit denen er im Laufe seines Lebens zu tun hatte.']

[139] See Horn, *Indien als Erzieher*, p. 223.

be compared to the human greatness of Goethe, the greatest German' (*die einzige Persönlichkeit der neueren Zeit, die an menschlicher Grösse neben Goethe, den grössten Deutschen, zu stellen ist*). He concluded this flamboyant declaration with the wish that Tagore one day may receive the benedictory significance for India that Goethe has already attained for Germany.[140]

The comparison with Goethe is not an unusual one. Albert Schweitzer's likening Tagore to Goethe became famous and has been quoted often. Others did the same; however, they often did so rather superficially in newspapers, without spelling out the points of reference of such a comparison.

What follows are some stray letters written with some definite purpose in mind. In 1935, Rabindranath replied to a letter from Edith Geheeb who had requested the poet to recommend Aurobindo Bose for a post at the League of Nations in Geneva.[141] Rabindranath wrote of the 'pleasure to hear from old acquaintances' and of 'so many memories', he lauded Geheeb's move to Switzerland to escape from Nazi manipulation. But he had already recommended 'another boy' for the post.[142]

In 1936, another short letter, this time addressed to Paul Geheeb, was dispatched. It referred to Geheeb's speech 'A School of Mankind', which had come to Tagore's notice through C.F. Andrews and was being reproduced in the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*.[143] The final sentence of Rabindranath's letter was, 'The only hope of saving civilization is through "enlightened" education, and organizations like your Institut Monnier and my Santiniketan have indeed a great role to play.'[144]

In 1935, Rabindranath Tagore signed an appeal for funds for Geheeb's school which struggled to get newly established in

[140] Chatterjee, *The Golden Book of Tagore*, p. 96.

[141] See Letter by Edith Geheeb to Rabindranath Tagore, dated 28 August 1935, from the Institut Monnier at Versoix (HLA HStAD O 37/1130).

[142] Letter by Rabindranath Tagore to Edith Geheeb, dated 17 September 1935, from Santiniketan (HLA HStAD O 37/1130).

[143] See Paul Geheeb, 'A School of Mankind'.

[144] Letter written by Rabindranath Tagore to Paul Geheeb, dated 8 August 1936, from Santiniketan (HLA HStAD O 37/1130).

Switzerland. Paul Geheeb issued the appeal through the New Education Fellowship. Apart from him, it was signed by Béatrice Ensor, the co-founder of the New Education Fellowship.

An undated 'Bücherliste' (list of books) is preserved which enumerates twenty German books 'for Santiniketan'. They are books on art, philosophy, and religion which were donated by the Odenwaldschule to the library of Visva-Bhāratī in Sāntiniketan. Tagore had, while traveling, appealed for such donations in several cities of Europe. These are the documents which the archive of the Ecole d'Humanité (now transferred to the Hessische Staatsarchiv in Darmstadt) and the Rabīndra Bhavan of Visva-Bhāratī have preserved.

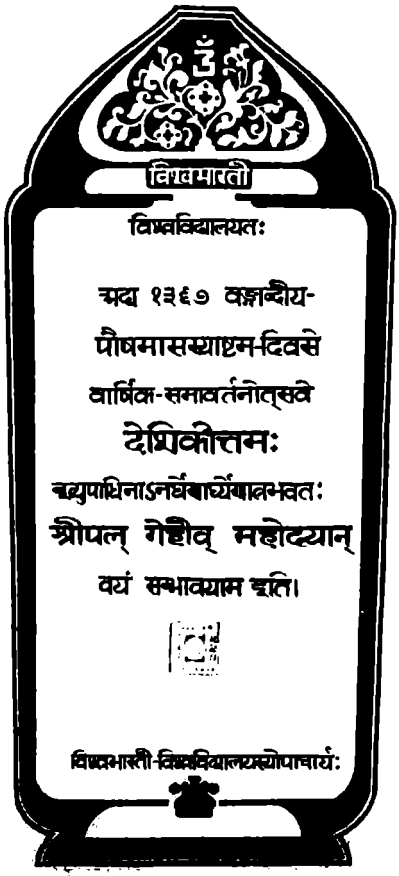

Figure 1.8 The citation of the Desikottama, awarded to Paul Geheeb by Visva-Bhāratī University in 1961
Source: CollMK.

It is apparent that after 1930 the communication between the two educators was limited to a few purposeful letters and public statements. This does not amount to a correspondence in the sense of an exchange of ideas. However, it is also safe to write that the Ecole as an institution has remembered

Tagore and his educational ideals and his educational institution; by the same token, Visva-Bhāratī has not forgotten or ignored Paul Geheeb and his educational establishment in Switzerland. One late proof of this is the award of the Desikottama (DLit honoris causa) of

Paul Geheeb und Rabindranath Tagore – zwei Botschafter der Kulturen, die sich der Begegnung westlichen und östlichen Denkens gewidmet haben.

Januar

Sonntag	Montag	Dienstag	Mittwoch	Donnerstag	Freitag	Samstag
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

Ecole d'Humanité, Hasliberg Goldern, 2000

Figure 1.9 Tagore well remembered in the Ecole d'Humanité: A page from the school calendar of January 2000
Source: CollMK.

Visva-Bhāratī to Paul Geheeb in 1961.[145] He was informed about this honour while still alive. The insignia of the award, however, reached the Ecole only after his death. Edith Geheeb received them instead in a moving ceremony.

There have been sporadic contacts between Edith Geheeb and Visva-Bhāratī even after her husband's death and after her visit to Sāntiniketan in the winter of 1965–6 (of which I shall write in Chapter 3), given how many acquaintances she had who were connected with the circle around Tagore. The last contact that is known to me is a postcard written on 2 January 1980 to the then vice chancellor of Visva-Bhāratī, Surajit Sinha. Politely she writes: 'I am now 94 years old—but Shantiniketan, where I visited in 1966 is a joyful remembrance.'[146]

[145] See *Visva-Bharati News*, 'Note on Paul Geheeb', p. 53.

[146] Available at https://animikha.wordpress.com/tag/paul-geheeb/. Retrieved on 1 April 2019.

2

Educational Ideals of Paul Geheeb and Rabindranath Tagore

Pedagogical Principles of the Odenwaldschule and the Ecole d'Humanité

The Landerziehungsheim Movement, from which Paul Geheeb's Odenwaldschule and, later, the Ecole d'Humanité emerged, has been mentioned a few times earlier in this book. I map its educational content briefly so that we understand the genesis of the educational principles which Paul Geheeb endorsed.

In Europe, the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century were rife with experiments pertaining to lifestyle, the arts, and education. The shift from an agrarian to an industrial, from a rural-based to a city-based society initiated drastic changes in everybody's personal life. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) was the principal philosophical godfather of these paradigm changes. With his dire warnings, he shocked educated society into an inner awakening and encouraged it to examine the easy conventions of bourgeois life. World War I (1914–18), from which the German people emerged vanquished and humiliated, threw them into a cultural as well as emotional crisis.

Education became the prerogative of the state, after the churches had lost their claim to dominate education during the Secularization Movement. Schools had become highly organized, regimented, and professional. Discipline, control, and standardization were seen as the keys to building a society which was capable of giving shape to the new industrial age. The new challenges called for 'more', and more widespread, education, as more literacy and better general knowledge and more skills were needed to progress further.

It is natural that this highly structured and regimented school system, which, its critics claimed, created 'jails' rather than institutions of learning, evoked a counter movement. This response came not from the state bureaucracy nor from industry but from private idealists, from passionate educators who broke away from the state school system. The leading pioneers among them were Hermann Lietz (1868–1919), Adolphe Ferrière (1879–1960), Paul Geheeb, and Beatrice Ensor (1885–1974). *Hermann Lietz* studied theology and pedagogy. After teaching in several experimental schools, he, at the age of 30, founded his first Landerziehungsheim in Ilsenburg (1898). After this, he founded two more Landerziehungsheime in Haubinda (1901) and in Bieberstein (1904). These foundations as well as his writing had an enormous influence on the pedagogical movements of his period.

The Swiss educator *Adolphe Ferrière* taught at the University of Geneva. He was on the teaching staff of the Institut Jean Jacques Rousseau in Geneva. As a young man, he founded an international documentation centre for new experimental schools (Bureau Internationale pour l'Education Nouvelle). He was a co-founder and a leading member of the New Education Fellowship (NEF). The four pioneers—Hermann Lietz, Adolphe Ferrière, Beatrice Ensor (a British co-founder of NEF), and Paul Geheeb—knew each other well and, at certain periods, collaborated with each other. Paul Geheeb made Lietz' acquaintance in 1892, and, in 1902, he joined Lietz' foundation in Haubinda as a teacher. However, due to disagreements, he discontinued working with Lietz in 1906 and left Haubinda together with several other teachers. Adolphe Ferrière and Paul knew each other from 1908 and they became close friends from about 1925. Especially during the dark time of World War II, when Paul had migrated to Switzerland, Ferrière was his close confidant.

Martin Näf emphasizes[1] that the Landerziehungsheim Movement in its *content* has emanated from the sphere of German classical idealism (*Deutscher Idealismus*) as shaped by Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Johann Gottfried Herder, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Wilhelm von Humboldt, and Friedrich Schiller. Other contemporary influences, be it Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, German Expressionism, Existentialism, or Irrationalism, all of which had already been active in the beginning of the twentieth century—in parts as a reaction to the social shifts already mentioned—were of minor influence. In other words, the *urge* for these new schools to be founded had its origin in the recent drastic social evolution, but the *ideal* which their education pursued was older, harking back to classical times. We shall see that this is exactly what happened in the case of Tagore's school as well.

Here are the educational principles which Hermann Lietz formulated in 1898.[2] These will demonstrate how close these foundational principles were to Paul Geheeb's practical application in his two schools, starting from 1910. They will also show that Lietz's ideas were deeply related to Rabindranath Tagore's. Martin Näf as well as Walter Schäfer argue[3] that Lietz' ideas were not really innovative, but that they reflected the philosophy of various educational experiments during that era.

- The schools should be situated in a healthy, beautiful, natural environment, removed from a city and the influence of city life.
- Young and elderly people should live together harmoniously. Teachers and students should work, play, and live together. Teachers were meant to influence the students through their 'exemplary, strong personality', and the 'enthusiasm' for their profession.
- Students and teachers alike should participate in all practical work that has to be done, for example, building houses and cutting firewood for the winter, gardening, and so on. Scholastic work and physical work should alternate.

[1] See Näf, *Paul Geheeb*, p. 249.

[2] Summarized in Näf, *Paul Geheeb*, pp. 251–2.

[3] For example, see Näf, *Geheeb*, pp. 252, 254; Schäfer, *Paul Geheeb*, p. 25.

- Everybody should participate in the daily meditation sessions in the morning and in the evening; special holidays should be celebrated together.
- Daily art work, for example, drawing, modelling, singing (half an hour per day), instrumental music (if possible all together), and art appreciation courses were encouraged.
- A hygienic lifestyle, healthy food, that is, no alcohol, no strongly spiced dishes, plenty of vegetables, fruits, milk, eggs, fish were encouraged.
- There should be daily physical training through activities such as hiking, running, playing games, swimming, and gymnastics. The training periods were spread across the day and comprise about two hours per day.
- Daily instruction should follow scientific methods and be given with psychological empathy for the needs and interests of individual students.

Lietz mentioned one more point whose relevance, however, is not clear: 'abolition of all external coercion' (*äusserer Zwang*). After considering this list of the activities to be followed, I am not sure where individual freedom can claim its space. Should the teachers lead the students, tell them what to do and how to do it, or can the teachers allow the students to grow according to their own pace and inward disposition, making their own decisions? The latter option offers choices to the students. It suits the new ideas on education postulated by Paul Geheeb and, as we shall see, by Rabindranath Tagore as well.

I present a more detailed exposition of the education offered at the Odenwaldschule–Ecole d'Humanité. I weld the names of these two schools as it is not possible to draw a distinction between the philosophy and educational praxis of these two schools. The Ecole has, as its name indicates, grown from a German Landerziehungsheim into a 'school of mankind', that is, it has become an international private school with students from all continents.[4] Further, the language of instruction is now both German and English (to prepare the students for continuing their studies in either Switzerland or in the USA). This

[4] See Näf, 'Die Ecole d'Humanité in Goldern–der Neubeginn Geheebs', p. 102.

evolution answers to the internationalization of today's student body in private boarding schools.

Its syllabus has, as we shall see, evolved into offering a variety of courses and extracurricular activities which did not exist at the Odenwaldschule before 1934 due to its limited resources. Yet, the orientation of the syllabus towards a holistic education does remain.

Armin Lüthi told me that Paul Geheeb never defined a systematic philosophy of education. He kept himself open on different sides and allowed his ideas to evolve dynamically with time. This makes it risky to attempt a comparison between the two school experiments in Switzerland–Germany and in India. However, there are several detailed descriptions of the praxis of Geheeb's education which I shall reproduce summarily. Some of them were done with the Odenwaldschule in mind, others with a focus on the Ecole. For our limited purpose, we need not follow the historical development of the two Geheeb schools; rather, I shall look at the two schools as *one* phenomenon which shall then be compared with Tagore's school later in this chapter.

Here it is necessary to mention that the Odenwaldschule, after Paul Geheeb's emigration to Switzerland in 1934, did continue under the leadership of other educators. When the Nazi regime collapsed in 1945, the Odenwaldschule offered to Paul Geheeb to return and again take charge of the school. Geheeb, however, declined. The school continued to be a special and historically renowned school until it closed down under very unfortunate circumstances in 2015.[5] In this book, I look at the Odenwaldschule only as it existed under Geheeb's stewardship.

I shall start by quoting almost the entire speech which Paul Geheeb had delivered in 'autumn 1934' for the inauguration of his new school in Switzerland.[6] This was soon after his emigration from Germany. This speech can be seen as a 'vision paper'. Significantly, the English version of this text was published twice in the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, once during Rabindranath Tagore's lifetime which demonstrates that Geheeb's ideas reverberated with Tagore's. The

[5] See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odenwaldschule. Retrieved 1 October 2018.

[6] Paul Geheeb, 'Idee einer, "Schule der Menschheit"', pp. 102–6.

poet referred to this publication in a letter to Paul Geheeb: 'I believe it was Charlie Andrews who brought me your article and I felt, it deserved to be known in our parts of the world: hence its publication in the Quarterly.' And Tagore continued with the sentence which I have quoted earlier: 'The only hope of saving civilization is through "enlightened" education.'[7] Here is Geheeb's speech:

> It may seem very out-of-date to speak of a School of Mankind.[8] It was the fashion at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th, to talk much of humanity and citizenship of the world; but the history of the last hundred years seems to prove that humanity is as yet only an empty, abstract concept dwelling in the brain of a Kant, a Herder or a Schiller. Nevertheless, as Nietzsche once said: 'The decisive happens in spite of the facts'; and just because the idea of such a plan seems to us out-of-date, there is nothing our age needs so badly as a School of Mankind.
>
> One ideal remains fixed before our eyes: that of the economic and cultural co-operation of mankind bound together in one brotherhood. Such a macrocosm should be mirrored in its essential features in the microcosm of the school community.
>
> In considering all human and cultural evolution we must start with the individual. Human growth is first of all a completely individual matter. Pindar's saying, *Become what thou art*,[9] expresses the final aim of all human development. Goethe formulated the same ideal in the following verses:
>
> 'Gleich sei keiner dem andern; doch gleich sei jeder dem Höchsten.
> Wie das zu machen? Es sei jeder vollendet in sich.'
>
> (Let none be like another; yet each be like the Highest.
> How can that be? Let each be perfectly himself.)[10]

[7] Letter by Rabindranath Tagore to Paul Geheeb, dated 8 August 1936, from Santiniketan (HLA HStAD O 37/1130). The translation in the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly* is anonymous. A number of mistakes and misunderstandings have occurred. In some cases, I make corrections in square brackets.

[8] This is the translation of the French name which the school would adopt later: Ecole d'Humanité.

[9] Geheeb quotes Pindar's well-known saying in German as 'Werde, *der* du bist'. This is translated as: 'Become *who* thou art.' This is an important nuance compared to the translation in the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*.

[10] The precise translation is: 'Let each be perfect within oneself.'

Thus too the development of mankind is primarily a matter of individual peoples, individual nations. Each of us is first of all a Swiss, or a German, or a Frenchman, and develops as such. All education is conditioned by nationality, is dependent on geography, economics and political form of the particular nation. Every civilized state requires universal education to protect the child from abuse by the family or the society, and to assure to the individual free development and education, thus treating the individual as an end in himself. Happy the nation whose leaders wisely confine themselves to this task and allow full freedom to the individual for cultural development, following the conception outlined by Wilhelm von Humboldt in his early work entitled 'Ideen zu einem Versuch, die Grenzen der Wirksamkeit des Staates zu bestimmen' [An Essay on the Limits of State Activity].

National education is inevitable insofar as every child grows up surrounded by the scenery and culture of his country, the unifying element of which is both historically and organically the mother tongue. For almost a quarter of a century I was the director of the Odenwaldschule, and during that time I have often been much puzzled to answer the question frequently asked as to the measures we took to instil in our children a love of their country. An educational colony, living in glorious German scenery and introducing German children in the first place to the riches of German culture, what further can it do to inculcate true patriotism?

Nevertheless, just as in such an 'educational province'[11] we experience daily the normal tension which exists between the individual and the community—the two foci of all cultural development—so we should get our young people to experience in practice the further tension that comes from the relation of the nation to mankind. It is not enough, in order to achieve this, that a national school should accept children of other nations as guests, so to speak, in the way the Odenwald school did (about a fifth of the pupils of the Odenwald [school] were foreigners). In the School of Mankind, as far as possible, all the great cultures of the present day would be represented—not only the Western cultures, French, Anglo-Saxon, German, Slav, but

[11] In German: 'Pädagogische Provinz'. This is the name of a chapter in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* (Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years), a late novel completed in 1829. The 'educational province' is an isolated, idyllic place where an ideal education in freedom and harmony is being practiced. It elucidates Goethe's ideas on education.

also the Eastern ones, especially Chinese and Indian—each with its own separate working community [*Arbeitsgemeinschaften*], consisting of worthy representatives of the particular culture as teachers and as children belonging to the race and nation in question. These communities [*Kulturgemeinschaften*] would exist side by side in the school with equal rights and would mutually enrich one another. In course of time it should be possible to attract fine educationists from the different countries as well as children of the most diverse nations, and thus build up each separate community in such a way that it embodied worthily the national culture and could introduce the newcomer to it in an attractive way.

Imagine then a school in the form of a Landerziehungsheim (country boarding school), made up of five or six such cultural communities, each of which consists of an average, at first, of twenty members, teachers and children, belonging to a particular nation. These independent communities would find their happy synthesis in the consciousness of representing ideally the culture of Mankind. The government of the whole would rest in the hands of a small committee consisting of a representative of each community. It is possible that for a time there might be [a single] person who [holds] all the threads of government in his hands. It will not be hard to overcome language difficulties. In no case should one language dominate. Besides a thorough study of the mother tongue, it would be taken for granted that three languages would be learnt: English, French, and German. Each community would be an independent group, living if possible in separate houses. School assemblies [*Schulgemeinden*], religious worship, common meals, and many other occasions would suffice to unite all these national communities into one harmonious whole. The basis of organization would be not the language but the cultural unity [*Kulturgemeinschaft*]. Another principle of division would, however, be introduced by the attempt to form working groups [*Arbeitsgemeinschaften*] in particular subjects consisting of members of different nations insofar as insurmountable technical differences, such as those of method, do not exist. Such groups of boys and girls belonging to different nations would not only work in the shops at carpentry, book-binding, weaving, et cetera, but would easily be formed for the natural sciences and also for courses in the general [supranational] history of civilization. When a child belonging to one of the great cultures [enters] the school he would normally join the community of his own nation. In other cases, the decision would depend upon such factors as attitude and inclination and upon the question

as to which community would help the child's development most. Account would also, of course, have to be taken of previous training and knowledge of the language. The more firmly grounded the child [is] in the culture of his own nation (to lay this foundation would be the chief task of each national community), the closer and more fruitful would be his contacts with other foreign communities.

I know that in many lands this idea of a School of Mankind hovers as a vision and a hope before the eyes of an increasing number of young teachers; they look with longing for its realization. The ubiquitous microbes of nationalism and fascism have caused a most happy [counter-] reaction; for unnumbered millions have become aware of the desire to establish[,] above the mutually distrustful nations, bristling with arms, a community of Mankind serving a common [cultural] ideal. The evil moral consequences of the world war have increasingly convinced men during the last twenty years of the value of education in the sense of character formation. The economic crisis,[12] besides, which might lead many superficial observers to think that soon nobody will have any money left for education, has made numberless parents realize that they can leave their children no better and safer heritage than as complete an education as possible, one that shall equip them physically and mentally, technically and morally, to face the terrible problems of the modern world. From all countries, therefore, children [shall] flock to this School of Mankind once it is founded. [Expensive boarding schools, which provide the spoilt children of rich parents with comfortable lives and much service as the result of little effort, have no right to exist today.[13]] The kind of school we are thinking of presupposes that the principle of education for self-government [autonomy] shall be bravely carried through to its ultimate consequences. It would be a school community [*Jugendgemeinschaft*] in which each member, from the youngest to the oldest, [contributes] to the support of the whole, every one being [equally] responsible for it according to the extent of his powers and mental development. All [can] take part in the necessary work in house, garden, and field, so that a simple and externally unassuming life, not requiring any servants, would be accepted as the normal and desirable [habitual] way of living.

[12] '*Weltwirtschaftskrise*', that is, the Great Depression which shook the economies of North America and Europe in 1929–30.

[13] This sentence does not exist in the German text.

My late friend Dr. Becker ... sketched the spirit of such a community as I am contemplating in the following words: 'Only when one recognizes in others—no matter of what nationality, class, or religion—the Eternal and Divine that one feels in oneself and for which one claims the respect of others, only then will the state of mind [state of the soul] exist on which the temple of a new humanity can be erected.'

When Kant in 1784[14] published his 'Idea of a Universal History adapted to World Citizens' [*'Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht'*],[15] he felt confident that reasonably intelligent political leaders would never again allow a war to break out. Since then we have become convinced with H.G. Wells that world peace is fundamentally an educational problem, although we are equally well aware that educators work more slowly than diplomats and armament firms. But of our final success we remain assured. For we are of the faith of Schiller:

'Von der Menschheit–du kannst von ihr nie gross genug denken;
Wie du im Busen sie trägst, prägst du in Taten sie aus.'

(Of human kind you can never think highly enough;)
[As you bear it in your heart, so you will express it in deeds.][16]

It is hardly surprising that Rabindranath felt attracted by this essay which touches upon many features of Geheeb's school which were also dear to him: emphasis on the individual in education; teaching in the mother tongue; internationalizing education, yet being grounded in one's culture; attracting 'fine educationists from the different countries as well as children of the most diverse nations'; family-centred education; education as 'character formation'; simplicity of lifestyle; the realization of divinity within man; education as education for peace—all these elements which Paul Geheeb mentioned in his

[14] The translation falsely writes '1714'.

[15] Another prevalent translation of the title is 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose'. Omitted in the translation is the half-sentence which follows: 'and when in 1795 he published the philosophical treatise "Zum ewigen Frieden" [Perpetual Peace]'.

[16] Paul Geheeb, 'A School of Mankind'.

speech Rabindranath had spoken about and has tried to inculcate in Sāntiniketan.

This speech was delivered a few months after Paul and Edith Geheeb fled Nazi Germany together with a small band of children to find shelter in the Institut Monnier in the mountains above Geneva. At the Institut Monnier, they had made makeshift arrangements to begin classes. When Rabindranath had been visiting them in 1930, the rumour about an impending war in Europe was spreading. Four years on, the threat of a war loomed even larger and, indeed, war broke out another five years later. Switzerland was neutral and had not experienced war since centuries; Switzerland was safe. But what does the word 'safe' mean when one is surrounded by the rhetoric of war and fear?

In the face of this scenario, Paul Geheeb—at the time of his emigration a man of not less than 64 years—had the courage to take responsibility of dozens of children, and he had the strength of mind to elucidate the ideal of a School of Mankind which would reject and rise above all that characterized the politics and the cultural winds of the day. His optimism that a humanistic education could overcome the evil influences of nationalism and fascism, is evident.

Let me summarize the points Geheeb put forward in his speech.

- His foundational ideal of education is spiritual: The aim of education is to reach the highest perfection men are capable of. The quotations of Pindar and Goethe substantiate this. The 'Eternal' and 'Divine' must be realized beyond 'nationality, class, or religion' in oneself and in others.
- In the centre of education is the individual person.
- Hence, primarily, the individual nation must shape education of children, supported by their mother tongue.
- Further, education must open up to international and universal dimensions. Ideally, children of all great cultures should be represented and live together.
- Each cultural community lives separately to preserve language and culture.
- Children of different communities mix with each other when 'working groups' are formed for practical subjects such as

'carpentry, book-binding, weaving' and for academic subjects such as the 'natural sciences' and the 'general history of civilization'.
- Education must be affordable and simple. The school must be autonomous as all work, including work in the 'house, garden and field', must be done by students and teachers.
- World peace can be achieved only through education. If you have learned peace in school, you will implement it through your actions outside as well.

To this framework of an 'education for mankind' a few foundational elements need to be added which Paul Geheeb held dear and are discussed elsewhere in his writing.

Education 'vom Kinde aus': Paul Geheeb emphasized that education should be visualized and offered to take up the children's point of view and their feelings into account. No adult teachers should set the rules about what children are to learn and do, but the children themselves must have the freedom to choose and decide all vital matters of their education.

Rural environment: Like the Landerziehungsheime, Geheeb advocated that schools should be built in a rural setting of natural beauty. However, the school must not be too far from a town. The Odenwaldschule was situated near Darmstadt and Heidelberg. The Ecole d'Humanité is surrounded by the breathtaking Alpine mountains with no city in its vicinity. At the present time, Lucerne, the nearest city, is two hours away by car, or by public transport (train and bus). In the first decades after the school's foundation, it must have taken much longer to reach the city.

Family system: The students live together as 'families', headed by a teacher. 'Family' in this context means that the students form groups which live together in one house and share certain activities such as meals, recreation, and regular evenings of conversation (*Familienabende*). These groups are led by a teacher who lives with the students, often integrating his/her own biological family with the student group. In the dining hall of the Ecole each 'family' has reserved a table of its own. This family concept ensures that the students are integrated into a group comprising of several generations, which is, however, not too large. The group studies together, but also spends time in discussion, play, and recreation. The aim is that the students

do not only learn in classrooms, but that they engage in 'social learning' outside them.[17]

No classes, but courses: Among Paul Geheeb's important innovations is that he abandoned the class system and instead introduced the course system for all subjects. The implication is that students of the same age should not stay together during the entire school day throughout their school life. Rather, by switching to the course system, the students meet different schoolmates with each course.

The courses are divided into morning and afternoon ones. The morning courses offer 'core subjects' such as languages, mathematics, and history, while the afternoon courses are dedicated to subjects in the arts, music, sports, manual skills, and crafts. This deserves elaboration. It is important to demonstrate the wide range of courses that, in the eyes of the Ecole, combine to represent holistic education. The Ecole's website announces: 'We offer over 50 different afternoon courses every trimester. The students choose their courses themselves and so create their own afternoon schedule—no two schedules are the same. In the afternoon courses students often discover hidden talents, and can also concentrate on areas relevant to their intended careers. In these classes students also learn competencies that transcend the given subject: creativity, precision, endurance, and tolerance for frustration.'[18]

Some of the specific courses that are mentioned on the same website are: blacksmithing, carpentry, pottery, photography, painting, printing, glass-bead making, silver jewellery making, weaving, knitting, and sewing. The summer sports include: soccer, volleyball, badminton, swimming, tennis, table tennis, trampoline, gym hockey, and yoga. Winter sports such as skiing are popular. In addition to cooking, gardening is also offered.

As to the organization of the mourning courses, each course lasts about five to six weeks. During that period two or three courses, each covering a different subject, are being taught every morning. After the completion of one course, the students begin another course with

[17] See Lüthi, 'Gegen viele Ströme schwimmen', pp. 74–5.

[18] See https://www.ecole.ch/en/afternoon-courses. Retrieved on 9 October 2018.

a new subject. Certain core subjects, however, carry on for a two- or three-course period. The course system provides for the in-depth study of one particular subject at a time.

As mentioned, each student can choose the courses he/she wishes to sign on for. The morning courses, however, are planned following the syllabi of government schools in Switzerland or abroad. Hence, students need to cover the subject matter these syllabi prescribe. However, it is their decision in which succession they do so.

There is no grading of the students' achievement which helps to create an atmosphere of fearlessness and cooperation between students and teachers. The students write a report after each course, and the course teacher writes an evaluation report on each student.

This freedom given to the students to, within certain limits, decide on their own education, bears the stamp of Paul Geheeb's enormous faith in the ability of young, not-yet-mature human beings to understand what is good and necessary for them to evolve as human beings.

Co-education: In contrast to the previously held educational beliefs and practices, Paul Geheeb strongly advocated co-education and introduced it in the Odenwaldschule as well as in the Ecole. He observed that a child is born as male or female and grows up within the world of male–female polarity. Boy and girl taken together constitute the 'whole human being' with all inherent human qualities. Therefore, no child should grow up in isolation of the other gender.

Armin Lüthi expanded the notion of co-education. Important is not only the togetherness of male and female students, but also the co-operative togetherness of different talents, generations, nationalities, religious adherences, and ethnicities. Such variety must be seen as enrichment, rather than as a source of fear.[19]

Consumerism is strictly discouraged. For example, drinking alcohol, smoking, and privately owned music gadgets are not allowed.

These general elements further substantiate Geheeb's educational system. How was he able to put it into practice? The organization of his schools is highly structured. Several layers of administrative committees guard and guide the individual, independent self-determination

[19] See Lüthi, 'Gegen viele Ströme schwimmen', p. 75.

of its students. It is somewhat paradoxical to develop a finely tuned and complex structure in order to create a space for freedom and self-determination. However, this is how Paul Geheeb decided to put his vision into practice.

I here mainly follow the descriptions of Martin Näf[20] and Armin Lüthi[21] on the organization of the Ecole d'Humanité. These descriptions present the school as it still functions today, of which I am also a witness. I supplement these descriptions with observations made by Walter Schäfer and Henry Cassirer.

(1) *Schulgemeinde*: The first and probably most important assembly which encompasses all committees and working groups is the *Schulgemeinde*. It brings together all students (*Kameraden*) and all teachers (*Mitarbeiter*), including the heads, and the administrative staff. The rule is that it meets once a week for one hour. It appoints the various committees of the Ecole and coordinates their work. It is the most important platform for providing general information which concerns everybody, and for the discussion of a variety of problems. The *Schulgemeinde* is always being conducted by one senior male or female student. The members discuss the problems until a consensus is reached. Vote-taking is unknown in this gathering as well as in all committees. The *Schulgemeinde* wants to provide to all persons the opportunity to participate in the life of the school. The focus on consensus decisions gives a strong element of equality and democracy to the functioning of the school. The opinion of teachers carries per se not more weight than the opinion of a student. This 'self-rule' (*Selbstregierung*)[22] implies that teachers relinquish a certain amount of their authority and depend strongly on the maturity of the student body. This is how Geheeb wanted to create a sense of responsibility and community feeling among the students. Henry Cassirer, too, emphasizes that 'education for taking

[20] See Näf, 'Die Ecole d'Humanité in Goldern–der Neubeginn Geheebs', pp. 101–12.

[21] See Lüthi, 'Gegen viele Ströme schwimmen', pp. 51–88.

[22] Schäfer, *Paul Geheeb*, p. 45.

responsibility' (*Erziehung zur Verantwortung*) was at the core of Geheeb's pedagogy.[23]

(2) *Committees*:[24] The Ecole (as well as the Odenwaldschule before) does not use the term 'teacher' or 'student'. Rather a teacher is referred to as *Mitarbeiter* (literally 'co-worker') and a student is a *Kamerad* (literally 'companion'), by those who speak only English as well.

(a) The *Kameradenrat* (student council) consists of around fifteen *Kameraden* who have been elected by the *Schulgemeinde*. It discusses general problems of the school which have either been placed before it or which it has selected for discussion. The sessions are public. One *Mitarbeiter* monitors and advises the *Kameradenrat* and functions as a liaison between the *Kameradenrat* and other bodies, for example the *Mitarbeiterkonferenz*.

(b) *Mitarbeiterkonferenz*: This is the 'conference of all *Mitarbeiter*' which has three forms: the *Ansagekonferenz* is a short announcement, done every morning, of information relevant on that particular day. The *Donnerstagskonferenz* (Thursday conference), lasting one hour, is reserved for longer and in-depth discussions and decisions. The *Zusatzkonferenz* (additional conference) takes place every month and lasts longer, that is, one and a half hours.

(c) *Kameradenschulgemeinde* (assembly of *Kameraden*) is to be seen parallel to the *Mitarbeiterkonferenz*. *Mitarbeiter* and *Kameraden* each have their own forum to discuss their problems freely.

(d) *Vertrauensrat* (confidential council) consists of four or five *Kameraden*, selected by the *Kameradenschulgemeinde*. The council can be approached for discussing individual problems confidentially.

(e) *Freitagsgruppen* (Friday groups) come together each Friday for specified practical tasks such as cleaning, cutting firewood,

[23] Henry R. Cassirer, *Und alles kam anders*, p. 25.

[24] For this section see Näf, *Die Ecole d'Humanité in Goldern–der Neubeginn Geheebs*, pp. 104–5.

care of the sick, care of the animals, decoration for festivals, preparation of Sunday prayer assemblies (*Andachten*), and so on. New groups can be formed as and when necessary.

(f) The attendance of the *Andacht* every Sunday evening is obligatory. It is a non-denominational and interreligious prayer service. Also the participation in the *Singgemeinde*, a session of choral singing is obligatory. Evenings of folk dances are organized regularly.

As emphasized earlier, freedom to develop according to one's individual choice is one of the key beliefs and expectations of Paul Geheeb's philosophy of education. This freedom presupposes a belief in the individuality of the child as worthy to be nourished and to be allowed to find expression. Walter Schäfer observes that such a model of education views every human being basically as an *artist* who needs the 'space of freedom to shape his life'.[25]

Rabindranath Tagore's Pedagogical Vision

Rabindranath Tagore's pedagogical vision has been described in several scholarly books in English, both soon after the poet's lifetime as well as recently. Between the seminal work *Education for Fullness* by Himangshu Bhusan Mukherjee (1962; 2nd edition 2013) and the recent comprehensive study by the Canadian Tagore scholar Kathleen M O'Connell, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Poet as Educator* (2nd enlarged edition, 2012), and the excellent summary by Kumkum Bhattacharya, *Rabindranath Tagore: Adventure of Ideas and Innovative Practices in Education* (2014), there have been several other books and essays that have engaged with Rabindranath Tagore's ideas and praxis of education. Rabindranath has himself lectured and written on education throughout his public life. In contrast to Paul Geheeb, Rabindranath was first a poet, *then* an educator, a philosopher, a political activist, a painter, and more. His role as an educator tends to become submerged among the many other, quite diverse, possibly contrary, roles he assumed.

[25] Schäfer, *Paul Geheeb*, p. 60.

Paul Geheeb has been an educator and a writer on education and has not gone beyond that. He has written on education even before he founded the Odenwaldschule until his very old age.[26] Yet, his written output has neither been extensive nor systematic. Basically, it represented his insights which were directly derived from his practical experience over the years.

Rabindranath, like Geheeb, offered no 'system' of education. Neither of them were theorists. Both had core beliefs, but apart from them their views evolved and shifted, and they were not always comprehensively expressed. As to Geheeb's educational principles, I have already enumerated a list of points, noted by himself as well as by others, that were important to him. I shall do the same with Rabindranath now. As the poet's ideas of education are widely known and available in the English-language books that I have mentioned, and in essays in India, I shall be content with a summary with an eye on being able to present a comparative synopsis of both views in the next section. The five points that follow do not reflect the historical development of Rabindranath's ideas, rather, they aim at bringing out their general character as it originally existed.

Rabindranath Tagore's key experiences, which propelled him to begin his school, are his suffering as a school boy, unsuccessfully trying to accept the British education system; his journey to the Himalayas with his father, Debendranath, who on their long walks explained to him the wonders of nature; and his stay on his father's estate in East Bengal where he came in close contact with the miseries of uneducated villagers.[27]

Rabindranath founded three educational institutions. In 1901, he began with the Brahmāchārya Āshram, named Pātha Bhavan in 1925, twenty years later, in 1921, he started Visva-Bhāratī, the international university, and in 1922, he, with the help of Leonard K. Elmhirst, opened Srīniketan, an institute of rural reconstruction to serve the village population around Sāntiniketan. Here, we shall consider only the first institution, the original one, the Brahmāchārya Āshram.

[26] See a list of Paul Geheeb's publications in Näf, *Paul und Edith Geheeb*, pp. 766–70.

[27] See Datta, 'Tagore's Ashram'.

One vital difference to the Ecole d'Humanité ought to be mentioned. We shall look, as mentioned, at Tagore's original educational ideas as they were being practiced during his lifetime. In the course of almost nine decades, these ideas have been modified and also diluted to some extent so that little of the original praxis remains. This is in contrast to the Ecole, which is still largely true to the original principles of its founder.

(1) *Āshram life*: Basic to the ethos of Tagore's Brahmāchārya Āshram is the belief that students and teachers should live together as a community. This practice has a long tradition not only in India but also in Europe. The European humanistic ideal of education has been holistic. This means that both in ancient India and in medieval Europe a teacher does not only convey knowledge but also teaches by example. A teacher's life is meant to convey lessons beyond discursive knowledge, factual information, and the teaching of skills. A holistic approach cultivated by the teachers has an impact on the spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical planes.

Such community life need not be acted out within a *natural environment*. It may as well take place in a city or in an industrial setting. But following the model of āshram life as described in the Indian epics, Rabindranath considered a natural environment as part of holistic education. Nature itself is a 'teacher'. Nature here is not primeval, 'wild', untamed nature; the āshram environment is nature domesticated by the inmates of the ashram. Wild nature is the habitat of wild animals, of creatures, small and big, which are dangerous to the well-being and health of humans. Wild nature is the space where ghosts live and act against human welfare. Domesticated nature, by contrast, is the space of agricultural fields and of gardens. Here grows what humans and domestic animals need for their nourishment. Nature is rendered useful for the sustenance of humans and their dependent animals (Figure 2.1).

Domesticated nature is the realm of *beauty*. Only nature which has already received the human touch is seen as pleasing to the senses, is seen as beautiful. This interaction between nature and humans for the ennobling benefit of both humans and nature, is viewed as a part of the pedagogical process.

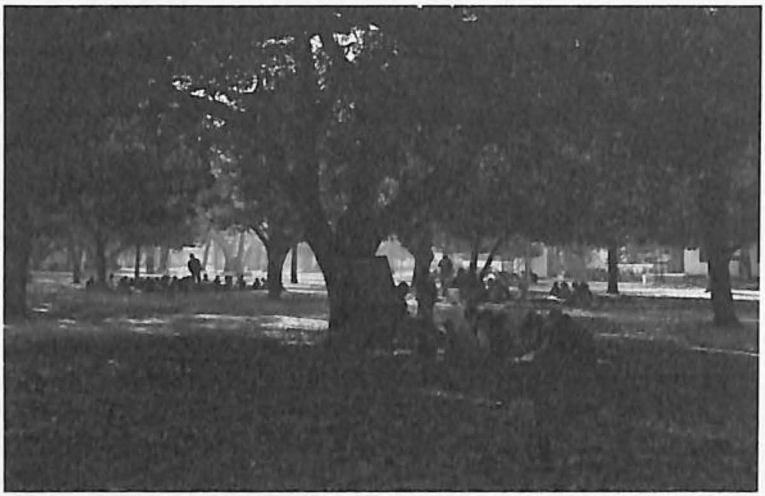

Figure 2.1 As during Tagore's time, the pupils at Sāntiniketan take their classes under the trees
Source: Samiran Nandy (2012).

Within this āshram setting, life as a community is made easy. The geographical distance between the homes of the teachers and of the students to their school is overcome while the open spaces of an āshram allow for sufficient privacy.

The basic model of any community, especially in India, is the *family*. Hence, ideally, the community is structured by an organic hierarchy. The head of the family, generally the father, is the *guru* of the community; he is the benign monarch who instructs and teaches, sets an example, and leads by doing. In Sāntiniketan, this was, obviously, Rabindranath himself. It is important to note that the guru does not lead (only) by giving orders but by his charisma or natural authority. The ancient āshrams of the epics were family-oriented. This allowed for a variation of lifestyle because āshram life has an in-built flexibility and spontaneity, not unlike a family. Obviously, the more the āshram family is meant to act as a school, the less spontaneity and the more structures and strictures it will assume.

It must be stressed that Rabindranath's āshram education was in several important aspects quite divergent from the classical āshram education. Before the advent of Buddhism, such an education was reserved, typically, for Brahmin male students. Rabindranath's Brahmāchārya Āshram was open to all castes and to both genders. Further, education was not in Sanskrit, but in Bengali, the mother tongue.

(2) *Simplicity*: The rule of simplicity flows naturally from the first point, āshram life. Simplicity of lifestyle was not a mere economic measure, although Rabindranth's school had severe financial bottlenecks to overcome. Neither was it a romantic notion which satisfied a nostalgia for the agrarian past. Simplicity was for Rabindranath, like nature, a tool to educate the intellect, the emotions, and to train the body. Simplicity allows students to experience life, as completely as possible, in its original and primeval state. It demonstrates to students how close to nature they are able to live, but at the same time, how inimical nature can be to humans. Nature assists human life, but it is also its adversary. Simplicity in education means to experience both in its full measure.

(3) *Social emancipation*: The holistic education that Tagore envisioned did not only seek the development and harmonious integration of the spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physical. Quite in contrast to ancient āshram education, Tagore wanted to make his āshram school in Sāntiniketan a microcosm of Indian society with the inclusion of co-education, of various castes, classes and religious communities.

Later, when Visva-Bhāratī was created, this microcosm was expanded to include global society, integrating different nationalities and foreign cultures. Rabindranath harboured the strong optimism that allowing men and women of different social, religious, and ethnic backgrounds to live together as a community would create mutual understanding and goodwill among its members. Such a community would discover common human elements and embrace them. It would see the unifying, rather than the dividing, features of a composite community, and find satisfaction and joy in this realization. This is indeed an optimistic view which has not always been borne out by experience.

(4) *Political engagement*: The ancient āshram schools have demonstrated an apolitical attitude. Geographically, they were, quite purposely, removed from the cities and centres of political and social power. They were often hiding places away from the centres where power and prestige ruled the social climate. This was true for Sāntiniketan as well which at the time of its inception was isolated and not closely linked to Kolkata as it is now. Sāntiniketan's āshram school wished that its students learn and develop their faculties undisturbed by the turmoil of city life, undisturbed by its typical features of social exploitation, ambition, and competitiveness.

However, Tagore's Sāntiniketan experiment was, although apolitical in itself, seen from a historical perspective, a distinct political statement. By its very existence, it opposed the British school system and all that went with it, like the training of the mind towards imitation and servility, the readiness to accept the English language as the lingua franca of India, the acceptance of the ultimate aim of education to become a clerk, an administrator, and receiver of commands.

(5) *Village India*: Along with M.K. Gandhi's āshram schools in Ahmedabad and Wardha and his idea of 'basic education', Tagore's Sāntiniketan incorporated the message that village India mattered and needed as much attention and respect as the metropolitan centres of India. The villages are essential as the givers of food, as the protectors of nature, of a lifestyle, and of beauty. Indian villages are culturally rich and sophisticated, they are a treasure-house of religious devotion and give an example of how a life with nature and with the cosmos can be led with human dignity.

Rabindranath wrote prolifically on education. Among the essays he wrote on the subject, no less than three were titled 'My School'. The shortest and final one is of the year 1931, that is, thirty years after Rabindranath had started his school. Asked by one Maria Steinhaus to write about his school, Rabindranath summarized its salient features and, at the same time, indicated which positive or negative developments he had observed since the school's foundation. It is worthwhile

to enumerate these features to know Tagore's own formulation of his concept and the hierarchy of his priorities.[28]

Rabindranath Tagore begins by emphasizing, as he has so often done, that he is a poet and that his school is the creation of a poet's mind. In other words, it is not the product of a trained pedagogue. Hence, its daily programme and course of action depends less on a calculated and systematic evaluation of the children's needs, and more on intuition and creative imagination. The impulse to found a school, although Rabindranath deemed himself to be 'not naturally fit'[29] to do so, originates, as he has often emphasized, from the negative, traumatic experiences during his own schoolgoing days in Kolkata. Rabindranath has described those experiences in some detail in his two autobiographical books, *Jībansmriti* (1912) and *Chelebelā* (1940). The regimentation and the rigidity of the school system during colonial rule were totally unsuited to Rabindranath's temperament. He dropped out at the age of 13 and steadfastly refused to rejoin.

Decades later, when the question arose of how to save his oldest son, Rathindranath, from the same negative experience, Rabindranath decided to begin his own school away from Kolkata, in an isolated, barren strip of land in Birbhum district of Bengal. Yet, the poet points to one other, more general, reason for starting his school: 'I knew that I had very profound sympathy for children, and about my knowledge of their psychology I was very certain. I felt that I could help them more than the ordinary teachers who had the delusion to think that they had proper training for their work.'[30]

Why move about 150 kms north of Kolkata? The poet's father, Debendranath, had bought a patch of land in Birbhum and built a house on it. Here, he retired from time to time to meditate and live peacefully. He called his house 'Sāntiniketan', a name which later would embrace the entire area with its several institutions. So, Rabindranath already had a space from where he could launch into his school experiment.

[28] See Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School', *English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore* (henceforth, *EW*), Vol. 3.

[29] Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School', *EW*, Vol. 3, p. 641.

[30] Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School', *EW*, Vol. 3, p. 642.

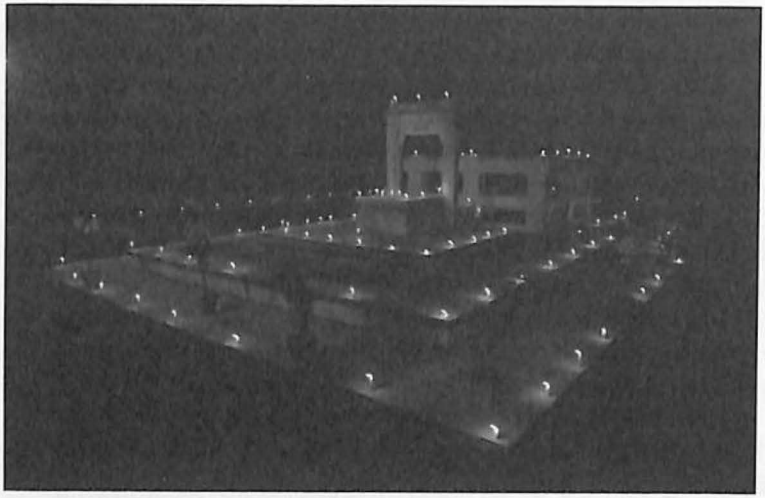

Figure 2.2 The meditation seat (Chhātimtola) of the Tagore family in Sāntiniketan (at the beginning of the Poush Mela)
Source: Samiran Nandy (23 December 2015).

The second, more virulent reason to move far outside the city was Rabindranath's urge to live in the lap of nature; it was his 'love for life, for nature'.[31] Rabindranath cites examples of how a natural environment can shape the sensitivities of a young boy, how nature can, as mentioned, become a veritable non-formal 'teacher' for children.

The choice of Sāntiniketan was intended to allow Rabindranath, the poet, to create around him the solitude which he needed to become fertile as a writer. At the same time, however, the āshram lifestyle was meant to provide quite the opposite of solitude, namely, a community life. Rabindranath writes, 'The teachers shared the common life with the boys, it was a community life.'[32] It goes without saying that this equal emphasis on solitude (for the poet in Rabindranath) and community life (for the teacher in Rabindranath) created an ambivalence,

[31] Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School', *EW*, Vol. 3, p. 641.
[32] Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School', *EW*, Vol. 3, p. 643.

and a tension, in Rabindranath's daily life which was difficult, or even impossible, to resolve.[33]

As part of community life, some of Rabindranath's most admirable talents evolved. He writes about his role as a teacher: 'I was their [the students'] companion. I sang to them. I composed some musical pieces, some operas and plays, and they took part in those days. I recited to them our epics.'[34] This connects directly with Rabindranath's desire to give his school children 'a complete life'.[35] He wanted 'to surround them with all kinds of activities which could stimulate their minds and gradually arouse their interests',[36] including their interest in music, theatre, and art.

The initial stage of the school's development was by no means easy. The school started with five students and five teachers all coming from different backgrounds. Krishna Kripalani, Tagore's biographer, gives a graphic description of the difficulties:

> The orthodox must have squirmed at this sacrilege, for of the five teachers three were Christians and the third was an Englishman. But that was always Tagore's way—to interpret tradition in his own fashion, to honour the past on his own terms, with the result that he won the support of neither the orthodox, who looked askance at him as an impertinent innovator, nor of the radicals, who considered him too ancient. He had to stand alone—a position ideal for a poet but inconvenient for a reformer who needed money and men for his institution. Even his admirers and well-wishers were inclined to believe that the school was at best a poet's whim.[37]

However, as Kumkum Bhattacharya narrates, Rabindranath persisted:

> Initially the students of the *Brahmacharyashram* did not pay any fees and the teachers who joined Tagore lived with the students and partook of the same food. Rabindranath's wife, Mrinalini Devi, looked after the feeding of the students but this arrangement did not last long; even

[33] See Kakar, *The Young Tagore*. In several chapters of the book, the author discusses Tagore's conflict between longed-for 'solitude' and dreaded 'loneliness'.

[34] Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School', *EW*, Vol. 3, p. 642.

[35] Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School', *EW*, Vol. 3, p. 642.

[36] Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School', *EW*, Vol. 3, p. 643.

[37] Kripalani. *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography*, p. 206.

> before a year was out, she died (on 23 November 1902). The school went through many rough patches—not enough students; not enough teachers or teachers who did not fulfill Tagore's ideals; instead of freedom of the students, there were too many rules and regulations at one point of time and the ashram suffered always from the paucity of resources even in providing adequate food. But at great odds Tagore persisted in this 'whim' as he considered the school his life's *sadhana* [discipline]; he was realizing a dream and an ideal and he saw the school as a medium of creative expression with which he worked for the good of his people.[38]

There are two terms on which Rabindranath Tagore lays emphasis in this essay as well as in his other writings on education. They are 'atmosphere' and 'freedom'. A pleasant atmosphere is the result of a proper āshram environment which stresses harmony with nature and harmony among human beings, especially a conducive student–teacher relationship. Tagore writes, 'An atmosphere was created and what was important, this atmosphere had provided the students with a natural impulse to live in harmony with it.'[39] This atmosphere was meant to uphold the ideals of education in spite of any unavoidable detrimental developments.

Freedom is one of Rabindranath's most important catchwords when it comes to characterizing education and lifestyle. A thirst for freedom was inborn in him, and he saw it as the only possible goal if one wanted to pursue a 'complete life'. The students, he writes, 'had perfect freedom to do what they wished, as much liberty as was possible for me to give them.'[40]

In this brief exposition of his school project, Rabindranath does not neglect to mention the 'growth' and 'development' which took place since the school's 'golden age' when it was small in numbers and fairly unknown.[41] Here, growth takes on the tinge of regretful negativity. In the beginning, the poet funded the school, including 'free tuition, lodging and boarding and all necessities of life' from his

[38] Bhattacharya, *Rabindranath Tagore: Adventure of Ideas and Innovative Practices in Education*, p. 41.

[39] Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School', *EW*, Vol. 3, p. 643.

[40] Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School', *EW*, Vol. 3, p. 642.

[41] Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School', *EW*, Vol. 3, p. 643.

'own poor resources'. In this he followed the ancient āshram school ideal where teachers provided education free of charge. Once teachers had to be introduced who demanded salaries because the number of students had increased, the school assumed a different profile. Rabindranath lamented that the school 'gradually ... has taken the shape of the ordinary school'.[42]

With the introduction of teachers, the question of training them emerged so that they would be able to discharge their duties in accordance with the ideal its founder had embraced. Tagore had no qualms admitting that 'in the beginning [he had] to struggle very hard with my teachers, not with the students'. He often had to defend the boys against their teachers. The growth in the school's size was, by and large, seen negatively, but Rabindranath recognized in it, first, a sign of educational success, but also a natural development which one had to contend with.

However, the poet also saw positive developments which, again, were a natural outflow from growth and maturity. He named three. First, while the Brahmāchārya Āshram that started in 1901 was a boys' school, co-education was introduced from 1909, and Rabindranath admits that the 'co-education system is quite a new thing in India. But it has been working perfectly. We have had no cause for complaint'.[43] Second, while Rabindranath's fame increased and the foundation of Visva-Bhāratī provided the appropriate space, a number of foreign guests arrived in Sāntiniketan, mainly to instruct the students of Visva-Bhāratī, but also to interact with the school children. Rabindranath recognized the enormous advantage of these guests whose presence would rid the children of 'prejudices' and 'nationalistic' moorings. Third, soon after Visva-Bhāratī was founded in 1921, Srīniketan received its own space in order to provide opportunities for the development of the neighbouring villages. This was to become a mutual process: the pupils and students were to learn from the village people about the living conditions of rural India, and the students were to impart to the village people formal skills and formal education as well as offer medical facilities.[44]

[42] Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School', *EW*, Vol. 3, p. 643.

[43] Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School', *EW*, Vol. 3, p. 644.

[44] See Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School', *EW*, Vol. 3, p. 644.

Finally, I want to trace the early history of Sāntiniketan's growth. Here, I lean on Kathleen M. O'Connell's exposition of the school's development from 1901 to 1921, the year when Visva-Bhāratī was launched.

A few months after the Brahmāchārya Āshram came into existence in 1901, Rabindranath's wife, Mrināliní Devī, became seriously ill and had to undergo treatment in Kolkata. Rabindranath had to leave the fledgling school in the hands of a teacher. From Kolkata he wrote him a long letter with not less than sixty-five instructions on how to regulate the affairs of the school in its different spheres. Readers expecting some exposition of Rabindranath's ideas in the style of those offered decades later in 'My School' will be in for a surprise. Little of what was later seen as the essence of the poet's school was in evidence in 1902, and the evolution from that year to the pronouncements decades later is nothing short of astounding.

Rabindranath's letter became known as Sāntiniketan's 'First Constitution' which remained 'in effect for much of its first decade'.[45] Kathleen M. O'Connell deserves thanks for translating this document in full. It is remarkable insofar as it is not a declaration of educational ideas and ideals, but, rather uncharacteristic for Rabindranath, a list of rules and regulations on how students and teachers are expected to conduct themselves.

This 'First Constitution' begins by stressing the religious foundations, the dharma, of the school. Referring back to the ancient Indian concept of *brahmāchārya*, Rabindranath extols 'discipline', 'self-control', 'devout faith', 'purity', 'one-pointed dedication' for the 'attainment of humanness'.[46] He compares the concept of a spiritual 'guru' with that of a 'teacher', making a strong case in favour of the institution of a guru or of gurus in his school. 'I wish the students to be devoted to their teachers with no reservation,' demands Rabindranath and expects that students pay obeisance to their teachers by offering *pranām* (touching their feet).[47]

Next comes the commendation of patriotism, austerity, steadfastness, and good habits such as cleanliness. To the *Gāyatrī Mantra*,

[45] O'Connell, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Poet as Educator*, p. 127.

[46] O'Connell, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Poet as Educator*, p. 128.

[47] O'Connell, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Poet as Educator*, p. 130.

along with prayer and meditation, is devoted a long section laying emphasis on the worship and internalization of the divine power that works in the universe and equally in us human beings. To 'grasp the [abstract] concept of Brahman', to become aware that 'God is everywhere, in water, in the ground, in fire, in medicinal herbs and trees'[48] is seen as one aim of education. Curiously, Rabindranath considers *bhakti*, or, in his words, the 'emotional excitement in spiritual discipline', as detrimental to the students as it 'weakens the mind'. This is curious because in his later life emotional devotion to his personal god was very much part of Rabindranath's religious attitude (as in his songs) and seen as valuable for character formation. At this stage, Rabindranath merely wanted his students to sing in worship of God as 'father' (Figure 2.3).[49]

Another section of the 'First Constitution' regulates the administration of the āshram school. Mention is made of 'salaries', 'budget expenses', the 'monthly account', but also of the means to assure the health of the students, their 'orderliness' and 'cleanliness', the relationship with outsiders, with 'servants' and with the guardians of the students in their family homes. The impression created is that Rabindranath seeks to cover all these practical matters painstakingly, leaving nothing to chance.

In the final section, he begins by having second thoughts about the 'rules' so far formulated, almost reversing the corpus of guidelines he had assembled with so much care. Rabindranath remarks:

> I have written out these rules for the time being. Gradually, as required, they will undergo much change and extension. But I don't place much faith in running the Vidyalay primarily by rules and regulations, because Santiniketan is not a machine to force-feed learning. It will not be able to fulfill its objective without the spontaneous outpouring of good will.[50]

With respect to the role of the teacher, Rabindranath also seems to backtrack in this final section. While initially Rabindranath advocated the institution of a guru to which both teachers and students are meant

[48] O'Connell, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Poet as Educator*, p. 132.
[49] O'Connell, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Poet as* Educator, p. 132.
[50] O'Connell, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Poet as Educator*, p. 138.

Figure 2.3 The 'glass temple' at Sāntiniketan where prayer services are being held since Rabindranath's time
Source: Samiran Nandy (2016).

to subordinate themselves, he now makes it clear that 'I don't consider the Vidyalay teachers as my subordinates. I hope that they will fulfil their duty through their independent good judgment, and for this I am always waiting expectantly. ... I consider them as my friends and co-workers.'[51] Pleading for the role of a guru—which Rabindranath alone could embody—is tantamount to opting for strong leadership and firm adherence to rules. Can this be harmonized with accepting

[51] O'Connell, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Poet as Educator*, p. 139.

teachers as 'friends'? Here I see an incongruity which is probably a general dilemma in Rabindranath's approach to education and has been plaguing his school from its inception. The cardinal question is: to which extent must discipline be enforced and when could freedom take over?

Kathleen M. O'Connell sums up the spirit of this document saying, 'The early history of the school appears to have been far from democratic and egalitarian.'[52] She points to the emphasis of the orthodox āshram school ideal (instead of modern ideas of education) and concludes that 'the tone of Rabindranath's letter is austere and authoritarian'.[53] Manifestly, Rabindranath, despite this 'First Constitution', ultimately veered towards the pole of freedom. Equally surprising is that the special quality of the poet's school—its emphasis on singing songs, playing theatre, and performing dances as part of education—is not even mentioned in the 'First Constitution'.

Rabindranath's early essay 'The Problem of Education' ('Siksha Samasya', 1906) is yet another summary of the founder's pedagogy. It was written in defence of his own school against the National Council of Education which had been founded in 1906 and placed a strong emphasis on Western educational norms.[54] Formulated a mere five years after the 'First Constitution', we do not yet witness a strong shift to the kind of philosophy of education which finally became known as Rabindranath's ideas and ideals. This essay is concerned with a number of practical steps, as the 'First Constitution' was. It denounces walled classrooms, the use of chairs, tables, and benches, meals taken in haste, and such similar practical issues. Rabindranath vigorously rejects European education: 'We must put the European model entirely out of our minds' so as to 'properly ... understand the ideals by which our country has been attracted and stimulated in the past. Because we have received English education, English models usurp the whole field of our vision and obscure the achievements of our own country'.[55]

[52] O'Connell, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Poet as Educator*, p. 143.

[53] O'Connell, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Poet as Educator*, p. 146.

[54] See O'Connell, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Poet as Educator*, pp. 153–4.

[55] Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Problem of Education', p. 114.

Again, Rabindranath propagates the institution of 'gurus' instead of 'teachers', and the importance of the brahmāchārya concept for education, which he interprets in a broad sense. He advocates the ancient system of education in forest hermitages or āshrams; he wants the 'freedom of nature'[56] to guide education; he demands 'simplicity, naturalness, and ease'[57] to rule school life.

In 1910, Rabindranath Tagore once again returned to the idea of the forest hermitages in his essay 'Tapoban'.[58] Here, he developed the idea of the forest as 'a symbol of purification, reconciliation and conflict resolution',[59] that is, as a constructive and benevolent agent in the process of education of a child as well as of a people.

Hence, it was natural for Rabindranath to use the location of Sāntiniketan not only as an idyllic retreat away from the polluting influences of city life but also as an opportunity to 'expand the role of the school and its relationship with the villages'[60] around Sāntiniketan. The establishment of Srīniketan and an organized effort at 'village reconstruction' was contemplated only in the early 1920s. But the idea that the school and the surrounding village life had to be interconnected got hold of the founder much earlier. After renouncing, at least partially, the school's isolation, participation in the social and religious–ritual life of the village people was a logical consequence. A poet who sensed and celebrated his unity with the forces of life and the cosmos would not want to shut his eyes to the human life in his immediate surroundings!

During the first decade of the school's existence, Bengal was being divided by the British rulers, which resulted in enormous social upheaval. For a limited period, the school experienced another broadening of its base. Rabindranath, who was sucked into the anti-Partition Movement, initially allowed his students to be a part of this political agitation. This represented a turning away from the purity

[56] Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Problem of Education', p. 118.

[57] Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Problem of Education', p. 120.

[58] Later translated by Tagore in an abbreviated form as 'The Message of the Forest'. He read this lecture in Germany and elsewhere in Europe in 1921. See Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Message of the Forest', pp. 385–400.

[59] O'Connell, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Poet as Educator*, p. 157.

[60] O'Connell, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Poet as Educator*, p. 158.

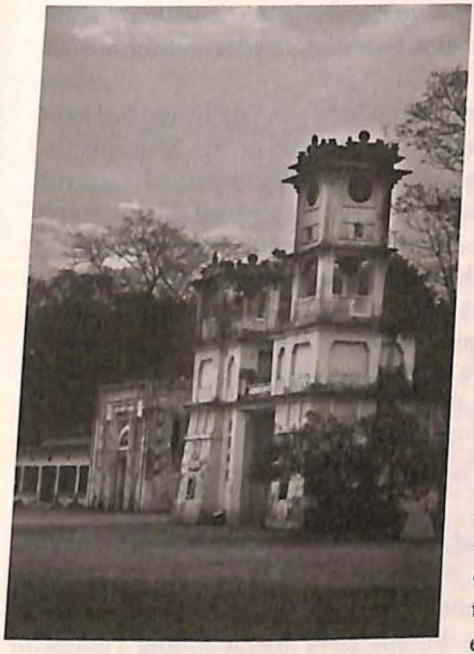

Figure 2.4 The bell tower (Singha Sadan), part of the old architecture at Sāntiniketan
Source: Samiran Nandy (2005).

of the ancient education system. However, when Rabindranath became disillusioned with political activism, his school, too, was rescued from it.

The Sāntiniketan āshramites began to celebrate village festivals and social customs (Figure 2.4). As the school grew, the students were divided into groups 'according to their ability in various areas'.[61] This is reminiscent of the course system as practiced in Paul Geheeb's Ecole d'Humanité. Further, mention must be made of the efforts towards a democratization of the school through self-government by the students. This is a trait which Basanta Roy and Ernest Rhys, two early visitors of the school, recorded.[62] Co-education was introduced as early as from 1909 which was, obviously, a break from the Brahmāchārya ideal of the school. Kathleen M. O'Connell remarks, 'What made the experiment so radical was that the girls were not put in separate classes but rather joined with the boys in classes, sports, and *mandir* services.'[63] The inclusion of women, portrayed by women, in Tagore's plays is a well-known fact; women, at times, even enacted the male roles.

M.K. Gandhi's association with Sāntiniketan had begun, and his pupils from the Phoenix School in South Africa, which Gandhi had

[61] O'Connell, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Poet as Educator*, p. 159.
[62] See O'Connell, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Poet as Educator*, pp. 159–61.
[63] O'Connell, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Poet as Educator*, p. 161.

founded, were being placed in Tagore's charge for four months (in 1914–15). Their presence seems to have had an effect on the school even after they had left.

For the purpose of our comparison between Tagore and Geheeb, I need not follow the historical development of the Sāntiniketan school in its every detail. After 1913, the year Rabindranath received the Nobel Prize, he more and more assumed a global role, accentuated by his long journeys in Asia, Europe, and the Americas where he met representatives of the political, intellectual, and academic elite. Although he did speak about his school on numerous occasions during these trips, partly in order to collect funds for its upkeep, his long absences from Sāntiniketan must have taken their toll on the creative energy of the school. Further, the foundation of Visva-Bhāratī (1921) began to divert his attention from the school. In Tagore's reflections on pedagogy, the school, now called Pātha Bhavan, took a backseat.

Need it be mentioned that from its inception the school struggled with the dilemma of how its students would be able to continue their educational career after they had left Sāntiniketan? Would their formal qualifications be sufficient for attending college or university courses? Would they be able to compete with their peers who passed out from government schools? Would the advantages they gained through a broad-based education and the development of a self-reliant personality be a compensation—in terms of career opportunities—for the lack of formal educational training? These questions haunted both Rabindranath Tagore and his successors. It is known that from very early on the Sāntiniketan school organized extra classes in its attempt to prepare the students for advanced studies in Kolkata.

In conclusion, I would like to hark back to Rabindranath's original intuition. What made a person who self-avowedly was a poet and nothing but a poet, and who at various instances confessed to being a misfit in the arena of education and human communication, spend, for forty years, so much energy and thought on educating the young? What might have been the deeper reasons? We leave aside the obvious driving forces such as the search for giving his son Rathindranath a dignified education and the urge to contribute to an India which struggled to emerge from the shadows of the colonizers.

For me, the essential reason is encapsulated in a paragraph which Rabindranath included in his essay 'My School' of 1916–17. Here, he writes:

> [G]radually my heart found its centre. It was not in the work, not in my wish, but in truth. I sat alone on the upper terrace of the Shanti-Niketan house and gazed upon the tree tops of the *sal* avenue before me. I withdrew my heart from my own schemes and calculations, from my daily struggles, and held it up in silence before the peace and presence that permeated the sky; and gradually my heart was filled. I began to see the world around me through the eyes of my soul. The trees seemed to me like silent hymns rising from the mute heart of the earth, and the shouts and laughter of the boys mingling in the evening sky came before me like trees of living sounds rising up from the depth of human life. I found my message in the sunlight that touched my inner mind and felt a fullness in the sky that spoke to me in the word of our ancient rishi—Ko hyevānyāt, kah prānyāt yadesha ākāsha ānando no syāt' (Who could ever move and strive and live in this world if the sky were not filled with love?). Thus when I turned back from the struggle to achieve results, from the ambition of doing benefit to others, and came to my own innermost need; when I felt that living one's own life in truth is living the life of all the world, then the unquiet atmosphere of the outward struggle cleared up and the power of spontaneous creation found its way through the centre of all things.[64]

This revelatory moment explains the poet's inner motivation better than any other passage I could find. He could find the 'power' to do his work as a poet *and* educator only after he had relinquished himself in a spirit of renunciation to 'a fullness in the sky that spoke to me' of love and bliss (*ānanda*). This is one way of explaining the inexplicable that happens in the moment of surrender to 'living one's own life in truth'. To Rabindranath, this surrender becomes identical with 'living the life of all the world', including all its demands, be they on him as a poet or as the guru of his school.

It is this realization that his work as a creator of literature and his work among men as an educator indeed wells from the same divine source and this indivisible work finds fulfilment in the 'centre of all things'.

[64] Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School', *EW*, Vol. 2, p. 397.

The spiritual universalism which inspired Rabindranath's vision of education was not in evidence when he wrote his 'First Constitution'. But fifteen years into the foundation of the school, he could pronounce, 'The object of education is to give man the unity of truth. ... I believe in a spiritual world, not as anything separate from the world, but as its innermost truth. ... Experiencing this spiritual world, whose reality we miss by our incessant habit of ignoring it from childhood, has to be gained by children by fully living in it and not through the medium of theological instruction.'[65]

Comparing Two Narratives: The Odenwaldschule/ Ecole d'Humanité and Sāntiniketan

The similarity between the Odenwaldschule–Ecole d'Humanité and the Brahmāchārya Āshram at Sāntiniketan has been a recurring theme of this book. Paul Geheeb had founded the Ecole and moved it to Hasliberg Goldern in 1946, where it is still situated. In 1943, that is, during World War II, Geheeb held a lecture in which he once again alluded to this striking similarity of the two schools which had been founded in the same decade and grown and evolved totally unknown to each other and within very different historical and social contexts, and yet happened to be so eminently comparable. He said:

> Psychologically, it is certainly interesting that Shantiniketan and the Odenwaldschule developed totally independent from each other, not knowing of each other for many years, until gradually numerous students and friends of Tagore stayed with us in the Odenwald and praised our school as the Sāntiniketan of the Occident. When, finally, in the summer of 1930, Rabindranath Tagore spent a few days with me, he declared that the atmosphere of the school made him feel quite at home.[66]

[65] Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School', *EW*, Vol. 2, pp. 394–5.

[66] Paul Geheeb, 'Idee und Projekt einer Schule der Menschheit', p. 174. ['Es ist wohl psychologisch interessant, daß Shantiniketan und die Odenwaldschule sich ganz unabhängig voneinander entwickelten, viele Jahre hindurch nichts voneinander wußten, bis nach und nach zahlreiche Schüler und Freunde Tagores bei uns im Odenwalde weilten und unsere Schule als das abendländische Shantiniketan priesen. Als dann im Sommer

The historical origins of these two schools have been briefly mentioned. Rabindranath's Brahmāchārya Āshram emerged from the desire to give an alternative to the British school system. It was a vision nourished by the ancient narratives of āshram life in the epics. At the same time, it was a protest against foreign cultural and political hegemony. Paul Geheeb's schools had simpler roots. They were the result of the generally felt need for sociocultural renewal after industrialization. The horrors of World War I and the yearning for democracy, for women's empowerment, and for liberalism called for new forms of pedagogy.

Looking at these two systems of education, which have grown and been shaped each in their separate historical and geographical contexts, they do have, phenomenologically, a great deal in common. In them we witness a transnational trend towards liberating children from the cage of strict formal rules of conduct and adult domination. It is the attempt to understand the natural progress of a child from the children's viewpoint, not from the expectations and the more evolved mental outlook of the adult. It is a trend which was later termed as 'de-schooling' by Ivan Illich.

A basic comparison has been drawn by Barbara Hanusa in her book on the religious dimension of Paul Geheeb's educational concept. As the director of the Ecole d'Humanité for some years, the author has deeply reflected on this comparison of the school in Sāntiniketan and the one in Hasliberg Goldern. She writes:

> Both [schools] have a concept which is akin to the classic structure of a family. Asceticism and simplicity as a style of life are other features that tally. The teaching staff, most importantly, are meant to be personalities; to be teachers is a secondary role. Their entire person is supposed to get involved in the process of education. Basically, both schools gear their instruction towards holistic learning. Both boarding schools find special meaning in a communion with and closeness to nature. In both schools, formal instruction is accorded a mere relative value. It may be replaced by more important activities like skiing, hiking or theatre rehearsals.
>
> Beyond this congruence, the foundational idea that education is grounded in religion binds these two institutions of Geheeb and Tagore

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1930 Rabindranath Tagore einige Zeit bei mir lebte, erklärte er, sich durch die Atmosphäre unserer Schule angeheimelt zu fühlen.']

> together. ... The education [imparted at the Ecole and in Sāntiniketan] is, in its basic structure, utopian and does not subordinate itself to external standards such as to the mastery of technical know-how.[67]

Thereafter, Barbara Hanusa lists those issues on which both school founders broadly agree. They are:

- *Nature* is the space in which religious experience is able to grow. Nature is where 'God or the Divine' can be felt. Hence in both schools nature is essentially a 'co-teacher'.
- The role of *religion*: The schools are organized as 'religious communities' or as an 'educational āshram'. Learning and human development happen through the 'encounter between adults and non-adults'. The result is that the teachers do not so much 'instruct' their students than 'initiate [them] through relationship' (*Einweihung und Initiation durch Beziehung*). That is, the person-to-person relationship between teacher and student per se is of great value as it—'informally and inspirationally'—mediates 'life experience and religious wisdom'.
- *Asceticism* is the basic attitude of the schools' communities. The important consequence is the 'freedom from the dependence from consumerism and luxury'. Asceticism is an element of the 'religious archetype'.

[67] Hanusa, *Die religiöse Dimension der Reformpädagogik Paul Geheebs*, pp. 216–17. ['Beide arbeiten mit einer Konzeption, die einer klassischen Familienstruktur entspricht. Askese und Einfachheit im Lebensstil sind weitere übereinstimmende Kennzeichen. Die Unterrichtenden sollen vor allem Persönlichkeiten sein, dann erst Lehrende. Sie sollen sich mit ihrer ganzen Person in das Erziehungsgeschehen einbringen. An beiden Schulen ist der Unterricht grundsätzlich auf ganzheitliches Lernen ausgerichtet. Beide Internate leben in starker Naturverbundenheit und -zugewandtheit. Dem Unterricht wird in beiden Schulen ein relativer Wert beigemessen, er kann von wichtigeren Aktivitäten, wie Skifahren, Wandern oder Theaterproben abgelöst werden.

Über diese Übereinstimmungen hinausgehend, verbindet die religiöse Grundidee von Erziehung die Schulgründungen Geheebs und Tagores. ... Es geht um eine Erziehung, die von ihrer Grundausrichtung her, sich auf eine Utopie hin entwirft und nicht externe Standards bzw. Beherrschung von Techniken zu ihrem Ausgangspunkt macht.']

- *Ritualizing everyday life* is consciously pursued. Its most conspicuous manifestation is the regular celebration of festivals. Both schools enjoy a 'festival culture' (*Festkultur*).
- There is a special relationship between being a child and the 'divine principle'. Both educators are united in 'their respect and reverence for the personality of a child as it reveals the divine'.[68]

The emphasis on nature and religion in both schools has been referred to a number of times. If we exchange 'asceticism' with 'simplicity', a term which seems more appropriate, then Hanusa's point also reverberates with the narratives in this book. The ritualizing of everyday life is a new and highly relevant observation. It calls to mind the many seasonal festivals Rabindranath Tagore institutionalized in Sāntiniketan, often connecting them to fairs for the village people around Sāntiniketan to sell their products. Many of Rabindranath's songs and dance-dramas celebrate the seasons. They continue to be staged by the teachers and students of Visva-Bhāratī. To make this possible, the students of Pātha Bhavan and the university have singing and dance classes from an early age. This legacy of the era when Tagore was alive is still active. And so is the emphasis on artistic and literary activities. The website of Pātha Bhavan states that 'emphasis is given on co-curricular activities aiming to unfold a child's personality through social, literary, artistic, musical and various other activities'.[69]

The child as a prototype of the Divine has created exemplary figures both in Hinduism and in Christianity. The infant forms of Krishna and Jesus occupy the imagination of people who follow Hinduism and Christianity respectively. Hence, it is natural for both founders to draw a connection between childlikeness and divinity. We remember that Paul Geheeb demanded an education *vom Kinde aus*, that is, from the perspective of children. Likewise, Tagore expressed in different ways that he is attuned to the mind of children. We remember the quote I cited earlier: 'I knew that I had very profound sympathy for

[68] All quotations from Hanusa, *Die religiöse Dimension der Reformpädagogik Paul Geheebs*, p. 217.

[69] See http://www.visvabharati.ac.in/PathaBhavana.html. Retrieved on 10 October 2018.

children, and about my knowledge of their psychology I was very certain.'[70]

Other points of congruence have already been elaborated; here I mention them as a reminder. One concept basic to Geheeb as well as Tagore, which Barbara Hanusa missed, is the idea of *freedom*. Within certain limits, children have the right to choose in which way they receive knowledge and experience. Geheeb and Tagore professed that children possess the intuitive maturity to understand what is good for them. Hence, they are able and they are required to choose themselves. This freedom extends to areas beyond the choice of class subjects and courses.

To show how far he was ready to grant freedom to his pupils, Rabindranath related the following example (which also illustrates his view of how deeply nature must be integrated into education). A headmaster rebuked a boy who climbed a tree and chose a branch to sit on and do his studies. Rabindranath in turn had to explain to this headmaster that 'childhood is the only period of life when a civilized man can exercise his choice between the branches of a tree and his drawing-room chair' and 'Should I deprive this boy of that privilege?' He continued: 'What is surprising is to notice the same headmaster's approbation of the boy's studying botany. He believes in an impersonal knowledge of the tree because that is science, but not in a personal knowledge of it.'[71] Rabindranath praised the 'instinctive knowledge' of a tree because such knowledge is fruitful, it obtains direct practical results as well as emotional fulfilment. In conclusion Rabindranath remarked, 'I consider it as a part of education for my boys to let them fully realize that they are in a scheme of existence where trees are a substantial fact not merely as generating chlorophyll and taking carbon from the air, but as living trees.'[72]

Co-education and the role of *singing and instrumental music*, two strong links between the Ecole and Sāntiniketan, have been mentioned earlier. Both founders had to fight against prejudice and timidity when they introduced co-education, which was then not common. Both expressed their satisfaction when girls and boys studied together

[70] Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School', *EW*, Vol. 3, p. 642.

[71] Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School', *EW*, Vol. 2, p. 391.

[72] Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School', *EW*, Vol. 2, pp. 391–2.

without any damaging effect on the school's ambience as anticipated by their critics.

So far, the similarities have been foregrounded, and they mostly transcended the social context or have emerged as a conscious opposition to certain features of society as it existed then. Reviewing these two educational experiments, was there not any essential difference between them? There are two which strike me because they, for once, reveal the difference of the sociocultural fabric within which these schools existed. What separated the two educational concepts is the idea of *seva*, of practical service to less advantaged sections of society. Paul Geheeb who, as we have seen, was a professed Christian, did not give prominence to the idea of concrete, practical, and organized 'love of neighbour' in the context of his pedagogy.

In the course of building up the school, such outreach programmes would probably have overtaxed teachers and students alike. During the first decade in Switzerland, the Ecole struggled to continue its classes. Depravation threatened the very existence of the school. That has changed. Possibly, Paul Geheeb's expectation was that, while in school, the students should concentrate on becoming good individuals and useful members of society. Helping others without being trained for it can be detrimental for both the helper and the helped.

It must also be remembered that then and now many students received and receive full or partial stipends. Currently, as an internet page reveals, '28% of students receive financial aid'.[73] It seems to me that the Odenwaldschule as well as the Ecole d'Humanité have exercised their seva mainly in the area of hospitality (*Gastfreundschaft*) which, as we see throughout this volume, was a salient feature of the Geheebs' way of life.[74]

[73] See https://www.educatius.org/School-Search/Switzerland/Ecole-d-humanite. Retrieved on 9 October 2018.

[74] Batja Håkansson comments: '[T]here was initially a rather hostile attitude [by the population around] towards the Ecole which lasted quite a while. There were conflicts now and then due to students walking on the farmers' meadows etc. It probably would have helped if there had been some sort of organized village work, which did not begin until in later years, after I had left. There were, however, occasional donation projects and always the tradition

The context in Sāntiniketan was and still is quite different. Rabindranath Tagore insisted on a relationship with the villages outside Sāntiniketan. From 1921, he began organized village work, that is his Rural Reconstruction Programme. The students of the Brahmāchārya Āshram lived in spartan simplicity, but they came mostly from progressive, urban family backgrounds. Realizing the economic gap between the life of the students and of the villagers propelled Tagore to offer simple services to the villagers provided by the teachers and students of Sāntiniketan. For Rabindranath this was a continuation of the service he had previously rendered on his family estate in East Bengal.

The second difference is more one of nuance, yet equally characteristic. Working with wood, metal, clay, and leather, and making sculptures, furniture, pots, and leather goods for daily use was introduced in Sriniketan as an extension of the rural arts and crafts programme. Originally, it was also part of the syllabus in Sāntiniketan. In the 'Visva-Bharati Bulletin No. 12' of February 1929, we read: 'Great stress is also laid on the importance of manual training. Every student is required to spend a substantial part of the school hours in learning the use of simple house-hold tools, and in getting acquainted with the elementary processes of Gardening, and House and Road repair. Organized training in Carpentry and Weaving is also provided and pupils showing special aptitudes are given the opportunity of learning a handicraft.'[75] None of this has survived until the present time, and it is not clear how scrupulously it was followed and for how long.

Clearly, the emphasis was on developing artistic expression, rather than on the sheer value of manual work for body, mind, and spirit. Possibly, it was frowned upon that, for example, a boy from an educated family would participate in manual work. In the Ecole, working with wood, metal, or clay is seen as a necessary balance to the academic 'core subjects' and important for fulfilling the aim of a holistic education. The benevolent effect of being in direct touch with the materials of nature and the importance of manual skills is stressed.

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of delivering Christmas presents to all the village children' (Letter by Batja Håkansson to Martin Kämpchen, dated 6 October 2018, from Stockholm [CollMK]).

[75] 'Visva-Bharati Bulletin No. 12' (Rabindra Bhavan Archive). I thank Kathleen M. O'Connell for pointing this out to me.

3

Relationship of the Ecole d'Humanité with India

This chapter carries forward the narrative of Paul and Edith Geheeb's relationship with Indian personalities after they shifted their school to Switzerland and renamed it Ecole d'Humanité. The meeting with Rabindranath Tagore remained a powerful memory and entered the spiritual legacy of the Ecole. However, actual contact and support from Sāntiniketan became rare and limited. Despite this, personalities who grew up in Sāntiniketan or within the Tagore circle, continued to exert their influence on Paul and Edith Geheeb. Most noteworthy among them are Aurobindo Bose and Shrīmatī Hutheesing.

Other strong Indian elements entered the lives of the Geheebs, notably the Rāmakrishna Mission with their distinguished monks Swāmī Yatīswarānanda and Swāmī Nikhilānanda, and the brief, but powerful, contact with Indira Gandhi and her sons. All these influences and encounters converged and became again alive in the winter of 1965–6 when Edith Geheeb visited India. She spent time at Belur Math, the Motherhouse of the Rāmakrishna Order in the north of Kolkata; she was the guest of Shrīmatī Tagore and her husband, Saumyendranāth, in Kolkata. Edith visited Sāntiniketan with its echoes of the Tagore

legacy. She met V.N. Sharma and Ellen Sharma, both former teachers of the Odenwaldschule, in Madras and witnessed the continuation of the Odenwaldschule–Ecole d'Humanité model of education in India. And finally, Edith Geheeb was the guest of Indira Gandhi in Delhi at a crucial moment of the future Indian Prime Minister's life.

Aurobindo Bose (after 1934)

It is not quite clear how the relationship of Aurobindo Bose with Paul and Edith Geheeb evolved after they migrated to Switzerland. Aurobindo's afore-mentioned 'Curriculum Vitae'[1] does not provide an exact chronological sequence of his professional engagements. It mentions that he has been a 'teacher' at the Odenwaldschule, but it does not say when. Aurobindo does indicate that from 1925 to 1935, he worked 'as an independent journalist in Berlin, Vienna, Geneva' and 'acted as Central European Correspondent to "*Advance*" (founded by Deshbandhu C.R. Das), *Hindustan Times* (Delhi), *Modern Review* (Calcutta)'. After this, namely, from September 1935 to August 1939, he was a 'journalist accredited to the League of Nations'. According to the 'Curriculum Vitae', he was 'appointed Temporary Collaborator to the League Secretariat' in 1938 and 1939 'by the Secretary General'. This work as a journalist in Geneva seems to be the first professional work which he took up after the migration of the Geheebs to Switzerland. The Geheebs, too, first settled in the vicinity of Geneva.

The 'Curriculium Vitae' gives a rather elaborate explanation about his involvement with the League of Nations. Here it says:

> As a European Correspondent to several Indian papers for over two decades, I tried to keep myself abreast of political developments in the International field. During my four years [of] work in Geneva I made a thorough and detailed study of the working of the League machinery. I attended six sessions of the Assembly meeting and about a dozen meetings of the League Council. As a Temporary Collaborator of the League Secretariat I had the opportunity of meeting the Heads of the various departments and discussing the work carried on under their supervision. All this political experience may be of some use, if I am

[1] A two-page list of his 'Education', 'Professional Career', and 'Special Qualifications', written at the Ecole d'Humanité in 'April 1948' (CollMK).

selected to serve in the Diplomatic Service of my country or in the secretariat of the U.N.O. [United Nations Organization].

Aurobindo was not selected to the Indian diplomatic service or to the UNO. His attempts to gain a foothold in a permanent and dignified employment position began much earlier. Its first evidence is from the time of the Geheebs's shift to Switzerland. On 28 August 1935, Edith Geheeb wrote a three-page letter to Rabindranath Tagore from Versoix near Geneva.

Revered Sir, when you visited us at Odenwald-School, I had a long talk with you regarding our dear friend Aurobindo (Bose) and you heard with great interest and sympathy all I had to say about him. We both agreed, that Aurobindo must have some definite work in life, to which he can devote himself wholeheartedly. As Aurobindo has already informed you a great chance has come to him to get a post in the League of Nations; there is a post vacant in the political department, which is reserved for an Indian. My husband and I both feel very strongly, that Aurobindo with all his upbringing and cultural background is the most suitable person for this post. In these very critical days for the League, one needs such men to work in its organization who possess not merely technical qualifications, but believe with all their heart and soul in the ideals for which the League stands and who are really free of all narrow nationalistic prejudices. After having imbibed the finest that is in Indian culture in your institution he has through his long years[']stay in Europe really been able to assimilate the best that is in our culture. ... And yet, I feel very strongly, that in spite of his long sojourn in Europe, he has not lost the spiritual heritage of India and become superficially [E]uropeanized like many Indians. I see in him a product of that synthesis, which you have preached and held forth as an ideal before young India.

... The difficulty with him till now has been, that in spite of all his noble ideals and high aspirations he has never had a field of activity. I feel that this is a great opportunity for him and that he will give the best of him in this work. Aurobindo is no more the same as we have known him some years back; he is much more balanced and grown in inner strength. With all his weaknesses I love Aurobindo very much and I think you have the same feelings for him.[2]

[2] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Rabindranath Tagore, dated 28 August 1935, from Versoix (HLA HStAD O 37/1130).

This fervent appeal for a letter of recommendation was directed to a man who had been a mentor to Aurobindo since his childhood and was, therefore, destined to know the boy and the man Aurobindo more deeply than his German well-wisher. If nothing else, it shows the emotional ties that had been formed between Edith Geheeb and Aurobindo Bose.

Edith Geheeb's letter ends with referring to the school's new situation and how they continue to remember and revere the Indian poet: 'In our assembly hall hangs your picture and my husband reads often to the children from your works and I needn't add how the children love it.'

Rabindranath's typewritten reply was of 17 September 1935. After two short, polite paragraphs about the school's shift to Switzerland, Rabindranath came to the point: 'I wish I could see my way to do what you would wish me to do for Aurobindo. I am certainly interested in his welfare and wish him to justify his promise. But in this particular case I have already given my recommendation for the appointment to another boy.'[3]

Aurobindo's 'Curriculum Vitae' specifically mentioned the UNO as an institution at which he would like to be employed, citing his international experience. On 18 April 1947, Paul Geheeb made another attempt and wrote to Dr Julian Huxley, the famous biologist, then the first Director General of UNESCO in Paris, asking for a job for Aurobindo. Geheeb praised Aurobindo Bose fulsomely as a 'capable physicist', 'sensitive educator', and as an 'unswerving fighter for international understanding, cultural cooperation of Orient and Occident, for democracy and world peace'.[4] Geheeb considered Aurobindo as 'specially suitable' to work for the UNESCO.

Aurobindo Bose's relationship to Paul and Edith Geheeb was uneven and complex. The Hessische Staatsarchiv in Darmstadt keeps a number of letters written by Aurobindo to 'Dearest Paulus'

[3] Letter by Rabindranath Tagore to Edith Geheeb, dated 17 September 1935, from Santiniketan (HLA HStAD O 37/1130).

[4] Letter by Paul Geheeb to Julian Huxley, dated 18 April 1947, from AEH Hasliberg Goldern. ['tüchtigen Physiker', 'feinsinnigen Pädagogen' and 'unerschütterlichen Kämpfer für internationale Verständigung, kulturelle Zusammenarbeit von Orient und Occident, für Demokratie und Weltfrieden'.]

in 1929 when Aurobindo's friendship with the Geheebs was just two years old. Aurobindo was then a man of 37 years. His letters were adulatory, even devotional, projecting his meeting with the Geheebs as the turning point of his life: 'It has been one of the greatest blessings of my life to have come to know you and to be fortunate to claim your love.'[5] Elsewhere: 'I want so much to come near to you. ... But you do mean so much to me. ... Will you take me to your heart as a little brother and a friend and give me a little out of the wealth of your great soul that has suffered so much and always striven higher and higher?'[6]

This clinging to the Geheebs was particularly intense with respect to Edith (Figure 3.1). As mentioned, Edith and Aurobindo spent many holidays together. Edith was known to pamper the Indian man and lovingly called him 'Aurochen' in her letters. It is a pet name for 'Aurobindo' meaning 'little Auro[bindo]'. Such a prettifying name is normally given to babies and very young children, not to adult men. In his advanced age, Aurobindo appeared to have become more and

Figure 3.1 Aurobindo Bose with Edith Geheeb (1973)
Source: CollMK.

[5] Letter by Aurobindo Bose to Paul Geheeb, dated 1 August 1929, no place (HLA HStAD O 37/985).

[6] Letter by Aurobindo Bose to Paul Geheeb, circa 1929, from the Odenwaldschule (HLA HStAD O 37/985).

more, and even quite morbidly, dependent on Edith, a situation she apparently tolerated and perhaps, to some extent, also enjoyed.

When Aurobindo Bose was 81 years old, Edith Geheeb wrote to a physician in Lucerne describing Aurobindo's state of mind in some detail. Aurobindo had been ill, but he had recovered well that he planned to travel to Portugal for a week with Edith, and thereafter to England, both by plane. However, in December 1973, he again lapsed into illness. He suffered from vertigo and depression. This is Edith Geheeb's analysis: 'Bose seems to be threatened by a deep fear, he clings to me and fears that I—my age is 88 years now—may die before him. He himself claims not to have any fear of death. He clings to me tremendously; like a small child he wants me to be around him all the time in order to be pampered and get attention.'[7] Only when he was given books which found his interest his mood changed for the better.

Rabindranath had witnessed the problematic temperament of Aurobindo from very early on when the latter was a school boy at Sāntiniketan. There is a letter, written in 1910, in which the poet described at length the problems the young boy faced, but also the salutary influence the Sāntiniketan school had on him.

> For a long time, Aurobindo did not adjust. He was totally detached from the world, he was incapable of devoting himself to his studies and to other matters. I had almost given him up. I could not get him interested in studying. I could not awaken his spirit for things of importance. Yet, gradually this school touched his inner self which had neither an artificial nor exterior reason. There is no doubt that he slowly, without us noticing, received something valuable for his mind. From this beginning onwards, he has himself revived his spirit. This self-awakening is such a deep and magnificent matter that nothing in this world can equal it.[8]

[7] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Dr Meyer, dated 13 March 1974, from Hasliberg Goldern (HLA HStAD O 37/984). ['Bose ist offenbar von einer grossen Lebensangst bedroht, er klammert sich sehr an mich und fürchtet, dass ich, die ich jetzt 88 Jahre alt bin, vor ihm sterben könnte. Er selbst behauptet, keine Angst vor dem Tod zu haben. Er klammert sich ungeheuer an mich und hat genau wie en kleines Kind den Wunsch, dass ich immerzu um ihn bin, um ihn zu verwöhnen und zu beachten.']

[8] Letter by Rabindranath Tagore to Abala Bose, dated 30 Chaitra 1316 [3 March 1910] (Rabindra Bhavan Archive, Santiniketan CF BEN-43/29-44).

All his life, Aurobindo remained a devotee of the poet Rabindranath Tagore. He lectured on him in German and in English in Europe, evidently never moving away from the romantic idealization of his mentor. However, the most significant service he rendered to Tagore was translating several volumes of his poems from Bengali into English and German and getting them published. John Murray (London) first printed *A Flight of Swans* (1955), a translation of the volume *Balākā*. Next came *The Herald of Spring* (1957), a translation of *Mohuā*; and finally, *Wings of Death* (1960), a translation of Tagore's late poetry selected from several volumes, namely, *Prāntik*, *Rogasajyāy*, *Ārogya*, and *Sesh Lekhā*. In the 1970s, when Aurobindo was nearing the end of his life, another two volumes of translation were brought out by the publisher Peter Owen, namely, *Later Poems of Rabindranath Tagore* (1974) and *Lipika, Prose Poems* (1977).[9] The latter collection was graced by a foreword of no less a person than the violin maestro Yehudi Menuhin.

Strangely, this apparent success of having, within six years, published three volumes of translations with a respected British publisher did not satisfy Aurobindo. The box with papers from Aurobindo Bose that was handed over to me by Armin Lüthi, contained, among other papers, the carbon copies of two letters. The first letter, of 1970, to MacMillan publishers in New York urges them vehemently: 'Please do not let this hopeful project now fall through, because of financial considerations. It is too awful to contemplate utter failure, when I was so near my goal! More I cannot say!'[10]

The second letter, of 1975, to the Secretary of the Visva-Bhāratī Publication Department, Kolkata, apparently refers to the same translation project, that is, the collective publication, by MacMillan

[9] This list follows the information given by Margot Schiller of the Ecole d'Humanité in a letter to Andrew Robinson, dated 23 March 1996, from Hasliberg Goldern. Andrew Robinson, Tagore's biographer in English, made this letter available to me. One book of Tagore poems in Aurobindo Bose's translation has also appeared in German, namely *Schwingen des Todes* (1961), translated by Aurobindo Bose and Ilse Krämer. Bern: Benteli. The poems chosen for translation here are those which also appeared in *Wings of Death*.

[10] Carbon copy of a letter by Aurobindo Bose to one 'Mr. Roberts', dated 8 June 1970 (CollMK).

Company, of Aurobindo's first three translation volumes as one single volume. This seems to be the course of events as deduced from the three-page letter: the Publication Department, the then custodian of the copyright of Tagore's works, made financial claims which MacMillan was unwilling to accept. These claims were later waived by the then vice chancellor, Dr Sudhi Ranjan Das, which, at first, were not honoured by the Publication Department's head. This tangle of claims and counter-claims persisted for several years while MacMillan Company waited. It waited for 'three years' after which it abandoned the project. Aurobindo Bose's second letter was written thereafter. In a highly emotional, accusatory tone it describes his 'heart-breaking futile efforts'. The long, rambling letter ends with this sentence: 'Believe me, it is with a bleeding heart that I write this letter! ... Yours in greatest sorrow.'[11]

The extent to which Aurobindo grieved over his perceived lack of success with his Tagore translations is reflected in a letter by Edith Geheeb to Batja Håkansson. In 1972, she wrote, '[S]piritually, he is not well. Understandably, it disappoints him deeply that he did not succeed in getting his last Tagore translations published. (The publishers reply to him constantly that they appreciate his excellent work, but that nowadays Tagore cannot be sold). This disappointment robs him of his joy to live. Even nature and music can no longer rejuvenate him.'[12]

Is it justified at this juncture to turn to these five volumes of translation and try to evaluate their literary worth? I am a translator of Rabindranath's poetry myself and have—as a guiding principle—attempted to produce translations which are *philologically correct* as

[11] Carbon copy of a letter by Aurobindo Bose to 'the Secy. V.B. Publ. Dept., Calcutta', dated 10 October 1975 (CollMK).

[12] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Batja Håkansson, dated 9 July 1972, from Hasliberg Goldern (CollMK). ['es geht ihm seelisch nicht gut. Dass es ihm nicht gelungen ist [,] seine letzten Tagore–Übersetzungen zu veröffentichen, enttäuscht ihn begreiflicherweise tief (Die Verleger antworten immer, dass sie seine Arbeit ausgezeichnet finden, aber dass sich Tagore heutzutage nicht verkauft!!) und diese Enttäuschung nimmt ihm seine Lebensfreude. Sogar an der Natur und an der Musik kann er sich nicht mehr ganz so auffrischen wie früher...']

well as *literary inspiring*. This means, the translations must content-wise have the elements of the original, and at the same time be poems of literary merit in their own right. This obviously means walking a tightrope from which the translator may slip any moment. Yet, this is the aim. It would require a lengthy and detailed chapter of literary critique to determine whether or not Aurobindo's translations fulfill these criteria. This would be out of place here.

I have had a look at Aurobindo's *Later Poems of Rabindranath Tagore* (1974) and compared some of the translations with the Bengali original. What I found is that the translations read well in English. They possess a sense of rhythm and a dynamics, the lines evocate the Rābīndric romantic ethos. The translations that I compared do, on the whole, catch the meaning of each word, rarely omitting a phrase or shrinking two lines into one. Compared to the Bengali original, the English is simple, somewhat unsophisticated. Unfortunately, the translator has made no attempt to introduce each poem individually and to describe its context, nor to supply explanatory notes. Perhaps in the 1960s and 1970s the time was not yet ripe to attempt meticulously crafted, philologically rigorous translations. Such attempts began a decade later, in 1985, with William Radice's *Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Poems*. Aurobindo Bose's translations, which caused him such agony, have unfortunately not enjoyed a continued impact on the English and German readership. One rarely sees his translations being mentioned in the present time.

Aurobindo was an enigmatic character. Lovable, as Edith's attachment to him amply shows, yet quite out of tune with his time. Deeply cultured, yet rather insecure, he must have viewed himself a failure in life. Even then, he personified India, especially the ancient Indian and the dignified Tagorean culture to generations of teachers, students, and associates of the Ecole. Let me quote two contrasting points of view.

On 14 June 2000, I had a conversation about Aurobindo Bose at the Ecole d'Humanité with its former headmaster, Armin Lüthi. He was then also in charge of the school's archive. Lüthi, who had been associated with the Ecole since 1948, became its head in 1961 as the co-successor of Paul Geheeb (alongside Edith Geheeb and Armin's wife, Nathalie). He had an acquaintance with Aurobindo lasting several decades. Relying on my notes, I realize that Armin Lüthi was

severely critical of Aurobindo Bose. He referred to his bad habit of name-dropping. Lüthi said that during Aurobindo's many years at the Ecole he did not achieve more than having been a 'charming guest' ('*reizender Gast*'). Aurobindo was 'amusing, interesting, but he was not taken seriously by anybody' ('*Er war amüsant, interessant, aber er wurde von niemandem ernst genommen*'). He did not teach at the Ecole, his knowledge of German was limited, and with India he had a troubled relationship. Edith Geheeb liked him as one likes and interacts with a friend, albeit a childish one.

This image of Aurobindo should be counterbalanced. A half-Indian and half-Swedish former student of the Ecole, Batja Håkansson—who lived at the school from 1953 to 1966 and whose mother, Hemlata Håkansson Bose, is an Indian singer and musician—provides an alternative viewpoint. She has been a close link with the Ecole in Switzerland and with friends in Kolkata and Sāntiniketan. As Batja's mother went on performance tours through Europe, she sent her daughter to the Ecole when she was all but six years old. Batja enjoyed long and close relationships with Paul and Edith Geheeb, and she also knew Aurobindo Bose for many years. While writing this book, she and I engaged in a busy correspondence with long phone calls in between.

A second erstwhile 'Ecolian', Tineke Adolphus from Uppsala, joined this correspondence with advice and suggestions. Both read my manuscript and did not agree with the negative or critical trend that characterizes many reactions to Aurobindo. They emphasized that he was the most important, and an enduring, link between the Ecole and India, especially with Sāntiniketan. Hence, to portray him correctly and with justice is of paramount importance to this book. Batja Håkansson wrote an essay for me which establishes an equilibrium of the image which has emerged of Aurobindo so far. I quote the central part of this essay here.

> In my early years, I and many of my schoolmates, mainly saw Aurobindo's funny—in our eyes sometimes also odd or even ridiculous—side. Everyone who was at the Ecole during his years remembers how Aurobindo, an enthusiastic but not graceful skier, would come flying straight down the mountain at considerable speed, legs and arms wide apart. He was dangerous, *lebensgefährlich*, not only to himself but to anyone who happened to be in his way. He was aware of this and

would warn us, before and while setting off, by shouting 'Hallo, hallo, PLEASE!' Even today, more than fifty years later, former students break into laughter when reminding each other of this 'Aurobindo warning'.

Aside from this I remember him as always friendly, cheerful, and encouraging on the ski slopes and in general at the school. At this time, he still had hopes of continued publication of his translations of, or work on, Tagore. But as I later learned, he had already had quite a few disappointments in life. But I did not notice any signs of the depressions, which Edith, after I left school in April 1966, wrote about to me.

It is important to remember that Indian music and customs often were ridiculed and laughed at in the West before the hippies and the Beatles, with Ravi Shankar, made India 'in' among the general public. I remember feeling embarrassed and ashamed, as a child, when some of my schoolmates could not stifle their giggles at the 'twangggs' of the instruments when my mother performed Indian music. Aurobindo may well have been a victim of this kind of ignorance and prejudice, especially as he didn't have the dignified appearance of some of the other Indian visitors or teachers.

Aurobindo never taught regular classes, but some of us older students, and especially one of the 'helpers/assistants' (*Helferin*), sometimes met with Aurobindo to discuss Indian philosophy and, of course, Tagore. He served as a door-opener. At age 15, I was touched by Aurobindo's Tagore translations, even though I felt I could not fully understand them. I had also become fascinated by Indian philosophy and religion and wanted to know more. I discussed this with Edith who arranged for me to have, aside from shorter conversations with Aurobindo, special sessions on Indian philosophy with an Indian woman, Sunanda Bose, who stayed at the Ecole for a short while. ... The sessions with Sunanda had a great impact on my life. They helped me understand Indian culture and my mother's view of life.

When Edith travelled to India in the winter of 1965–6, she asked me to try to keep Aurobindo company sometimes, as he was lonely without her. During these meetings we played many of his and Edith's Western and Indian classical music records and some of this music has remained among my favourites until this day.

Everybody was aware that Aurobindo was very important for Edith, but we also felt that he often behaved in a childish, self-centered manner and at times demanded too much of her, as she was getting old. I remember once asking Edith why she permitted this kind of behaviour. Her answer has stayed with me ever since. Edith said, 'We who can successfully manage our lives in this world have the duty to protect and

> support those who can't.' She felt that there were many talented dreamers, generally considered to be 'failures' and sometimes behaving in 'impossible' ways, who made valuable contributions to society, directly or indirectly. For Edith, Aurobindo was one of them. She was gladly willing to 'serve' (in a sort of Indian sense), not only out of duty but mainly out of love. The principle of love was essential for Edith. Aurobindo, in spite of all his weaknesses, was able to live up to that principle.[13]

Edith genuinely worried about Aurobindo's fate in case she, the older one, died before him. In 1972, she wrote, 'In August I'll be 87 years old—my health is surprisingly good, but I cannot live eternally, can I? And who will take care of Auro then, while he is such a loner.'[14]

Aurobindo Bose died before Edith did, while at the Ecole, aged 85 years, on 22 August 1977 of heart failure, although he had, at the time, no serious illness (Figure 3.2).

On 6 September 1977, Edith gave a short speech on Aurobindo Bose at the Ecole. Here she said:

> I have experienced a great sorrow. Two weeks ago, our beloved Aurobindo has suddenly passed away following a heart attack. He was very close to me for nearly 50 years. I have seen in him a very talented, erudite human being with deep feelings. He has always helped me. He had a hard life, partly because of strokes of fate that led to various disappointments. But most importantly, it was difficult for him as a person who grew up in a thousand-year-old culture, to live here in Europe as a modern man.[15]

[13] Batja Håkansson Hughes. 'Some memories of Aurobindo Bose'. Dated 5 June 2018 (CollMK).

[14] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Batja Håkansson, dated 9 July 1972, from Hasliberg Goldern (CollMK). ['Ich werde im August 87 Jahre—es geht mir erstaunlich gut—aber ewig kann ich doch auch nicht leben und wer wird sich dann um Auro kümmern, wenn er sich so isoliert.']

[15] Typescript of Edith Geheeb's speech (AEH). ['Ich habe einen grossen Schmerz erlebt. Unser lieber Aurobindo ist vor zwei Wochen plötzlich an einem Herzschlag gestorben. Er hat mir in fast 50 Jahren sehr nahe gestanden. Ich habe ihn als einen sehr begabten, gebildeten und tief fühlenden Menschen erlebt, der mir immer geholfen hat. Er selbst hat ein schweres Leben gehabt. Teilweise waren es Schicksalserlebnisse, durch die er Enttäuschungen tragen musste. Das Wesentliche aber war wohl, dass es ihm doch schwer ist, in einer viel tausendjährigen Kulturwelt aufgewachsen zu sein und hier in Europa als moderner Mensch zu leben.']

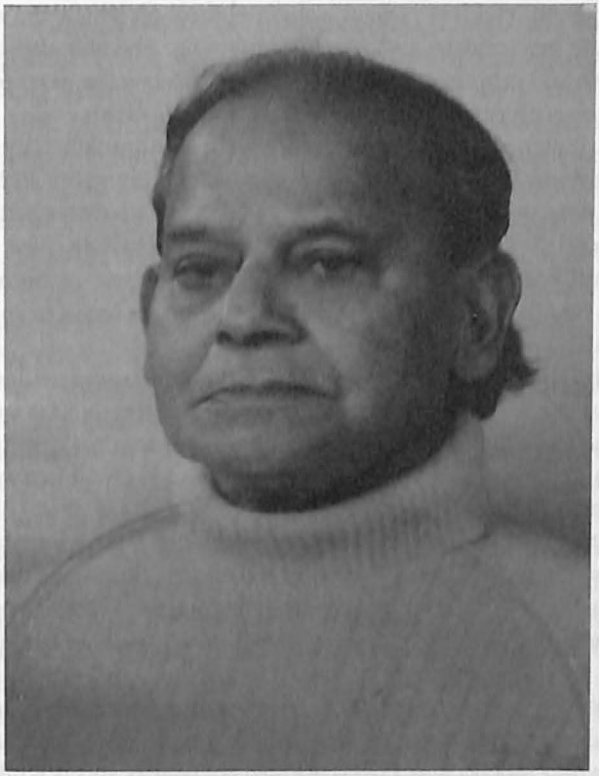


Figure 3.2 Aurobindo Bose in his old age
Source: CollMK.

A month later, in a letter to Batja Håkansson, Edith confessed, 'All the time I fight against desperation. What can be done? I must accept that I miss Auro—and turn to the good things that remain...'[16]

Having characterized Edith Geheeb's relationship with Aurobindo Bose, let me examine how the children of the Ecole reacted to her. The acceptance which she enjoyed has been more straightforward than the one which Paul Geheeb received. The letters I read, both by her and to her, give the impression of a warm-hearted, motherly, unconditionally

[16] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Batja Håkansson, dated 1 October 1977, from Hasliberg Goldern (CollMK).

loving person. Her letters were a channel through which she was able to express her concern and warmth of feeling. She was able to strike a balance and criticize or admonish when she saw the need of it. But she did so with care so as not to hurt the other person.

One instance bears mentioning. Saumyendranāth Tagore, the hard-working human rights activist, nonchalantly wrote to her that he was determined to work as hard as he could whatever be the consequences. Edith objected, 'But this is a very childish view of life.' Overwork may result in illness, suffering and even in becoming a burden on others. 'I don't ask you to be idle but to listen to your body how much you can demand from it.'[17]

Edith Geheeb comes through as a soul of purity and selfless idealism. But she was also a woman of practical abilities and (as we would say today) an efficient 'networker'. She was adept at making contacts, bringing people together, receiving guests and keeping in touch with old friends through letters.

Let me quote two former 'Ecolianer' who knew Edith when they were young students. In Tineke Adolphus' judgement, 'Edith was the person who really ran the school, as she had an incredible ability of keeping in touch with her network of contacts, which also grew with the years.'[18]

The second statement, by Batja Håkansson, can perhaps express and sum up most convincingly the relationship Edith Geheeb had with her students: 'The love and wisdom of this wonderful woman saved my life, not only when I was a child but also afterwards, in my adult age.'[19]

Contacts with the Rāmakrishna Mission in Germany and Switzerland

Swāmī Vivekānanda (1863–1902) was one of the first Hindu monks to visit North America and Europe in order to preach a modern

[17] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Saumyendranath Tagore, dated 15 March 1966, no place (HLA HStAD O 37/992). ['Das ist doch aber eine sehr kindliche Lebensauffassung. ... Ich rate dir doch nicht müssig zu gehen, sondern Deinem Körper abzulauschen, was Du ihm zumuten kannst.']

[18] Letter by Tineke Adolphus to Martin Kämpchen, dated 28 May 2018, from Uppsala/Sweden (CollMK).

[19] Letter by Batja Håkansson to Martin Kämpchen, dated 22 March 2018, from Stockholm/Sweden (CollMK).

brand of Hinduism which he termed 'Practical Vedānta'. With the dual purpose of serving the poor in India and enlightening 'the West' by preaching Vedānta, Vivekānanda had founded the Rāmakrishna Order in 1897 in the name of his guru, Srī Rāmakrishna (1836–86). After this, he went once again to Europe and then to North America where he founded several Vedānta centres. In the next few decades, a number of erudite monks of the Rāmakrishna Mission arrived in, Paris, London, and Geneva—among other places—to establish āshrams of the Rāmakrishna Mission. Romain Rolland's French biographies of Srī Rāmakrishna and Swāmī Vivekānanda, which were translated into English and German, contributed to these Indian spiritual personalities becoming well-known in France, England, and in German-speaking countries.

The connection of the Rāmakrishna Mission with Switzerland and Germany goes back to the time when Swāmī Vivekānanda visited these two countries in the summer of 1896. He had been in the Western Hemisphere since three years. He had arrived in Great Britain from the USA in April and needed a break from his missionary work to get some rest. Hence, he left London in mid-July for continental Europe, returning in mid-September. Swāmī Vidyātmānanda has tried to shed light on this two-month recreational journey, but he admits that in trying to establish the itinerary he was 'reduced to citing probabilities'.[20] The bare outlines are: 'The first two weeks were spent in Geneva, and the French Alps. The next four weeks in Switzerland. The following two weeks in Germany. Then three or four days in Holland on the way back to England.'[21] The Swiss leg of the trip appears to have been largely touristic with visits to the places British tourists of that period enjoyed seeing. The journey through Germany, however, was significant as Swāmī Vivekānanda met the well-known German Indologist Paul Deussen in Kiel. Both Swāmī Vivekānanda and Paul Deussen (in his autobiography) wrote about this meeting.

There seems to be no direct connection of Swāmī Vivekānanda's visit with the arrival of the first monk of the Rāmakrishna Mission,

[20] See Swami Vidyatmananda, 'Vivekananda in Switzerland, 1896'; Swami Vidyatmananda, 'Vivekananda in Germany and Holland, 1896'. The quote is in the second essay on p. 97.

[21] Swami Vidyatmananda, 'Vivekananda in Germany and Holland, 1896', p. 94.

Swāmī Yatīswarānanda, in Germany in the year 1933. Kurt Friedrich relates the events that led to his arrival thus: Wolfram Koch, a German writer residing in Wiesbaden (near Frankfurt) who was interested in Hindu philosophy, wrote to the headquarters of the Rāmakrishna Order, Belur Math, asking for a swāmī to be sent to Germany for instruction. 'In October 1933 Swāmī Yatīswarānanda arrived by ship to Genoa, where Mr. Koch was waiting for him, and they drove up by car to Wiesbaden. Mr. Koch had rented a house where the Swāmī could live by himself, prepare his own food and create his own atmosphere. The Swāmī started his work immediately, and his first classes were on M's *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.'[22]

Swāmī Yatīswarānanda continued his missionary work for two years. 'But by 1935 the Hitler regime had established itself firmly, and now turned against all religious sects and movements. Meetings had to be notified, and spirituality became suspect. Therefore, Wolfram Koch decided to move to St. Moritz in Switzerland, where he had a house, "Crusaida". There a new Vedanta study group was founded, and devotees from different parts of Europe started gathering there.'[23] Swāmī Yatīswarānanda made St. Moritz his base, but travelled all over Europe. 'He stayed during the summer of 1939 in Sweden with devotees in Stockholm, and sailed from Bergen for New York just a few days before the Second World War broke out.'[24]

While she lived at the Odenwaldschule, Edith Geheeb already developed a special interest in Hindu scriptures and a spiritual life. Alwine von Keller, Aurobindo Bose, and especially V.N. Sharma introduced Edith to Hinduism. In Chapter 1, I have described how Alwine von Keller went to visit India in the winter of 1929–30 and met monks of the Rāmakrishna Mission. Her reports had aroused Edith's interest in Srī Rāmakrishna and the Rāmakrishna Mission. Towards the end of Edith and Paul Geheeb's time at the Odenwaldschule, they were in touch with especially two monks of the Rāmakrishna Mission who had visited Germany. This relationship would continue when the school shifted to Switzerland.

[22] Friedrich, 'Vedanta in Germany', p. 36.

[23] Friedrich, 'Vedanta in Germany', pp. 36–7.

[24] Friedrich, 'Vedanta in Germany', p. 37.

As mentioned, *Swāmī Yatīswarānanda* (1889–1966) arrived in Germany to preach Vedānta, also hoping to found a centre of the Rāmakrishna Mission. He was a disciple of Swami Brahmananda, who had been himself a direct disciple of Srī Rāmakrishna. Swāmī Yatīswarānanda joined the Rāmakrishna Order at the age of 22 and later became the editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*, an English-language journal of the Rāmakrishna Mission, while staying at Mayavati (Himalayas). Thereafter, he was attached to the Rāmakrishna Mission āshrams in Bombay (now Mumbai) and Madras (now Chennai) until he departed for Europe.

His travels in Europe served to teach small groups of disciples which had gathered around him. Unfortunately, he was unable to establish a permanent centre. The political turmoil prevalent in Europe at the time—in 1933, Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany—must have contributed to this failure.

Later, Swāmī Yatīswarānanda founded the Vedānta Centre in Philadelphia (USA) and in 1951 returned to India where he joined the Rāmakrishna Mission Āshram in Bangalore. From 1962 until his death in 1966 he served as the vice president of the Rāmakrishna Math and Mission.[25]

Swāmī Yatiswarānanda was the first Hindu monk Edith Geheeb came in contact with. Edith Geheeb and Alwine von Keller went to hear him speak a few times in Wiesbaden, and the Hindu monk stayed 'once or twice' at the Odenwaldschule during the winter of 1933–4.[26] When the Geheebs had to shift to Switzerland, the Swāmī was a frequent guest at the Institut Monnier; Edith attended his lectures in Geneva and St. Moritz. The correspondence between Swāmī Yatīswarānanda and Edith Geheeb lasted from 1933 until his death on 27 January1966.

This correspondence has some dominant themes. One was the Swāmī's eagerness and search to start a permanent centre of the Rāmakrishna Mission, which he regretted not having been able to do. He blamed this on the lack of response by Europeans to the message of Srī Rāmakrishna and Swāmī Vivekānanda. At other times,

[25] See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yatiswarananda. Retrieved on 30 September 2018.

[26] Näf, *Paul und Edith Geheeb-Cassirer*, p. 517.

however, he felt confident that this message does attract contemporary intellectuals. Early in his search, in 1935, he told Edith, 'Many intellectuals who are real seekers after Truth are being drawn towards the teachings of Ramakrishna–Vivekananda not only in Germany but in all countries of Europe including Switzerland.'[27] Swāmī Yatīswarānanda's spiritual drive was the result of a global plan. He wrote, 'In India Sri Ramakrishna and His great disciples fertilized the thought world. Swami Vivekananda and his brother disciples prepared the mental soil in America to some extent. The thought life in Europe is so barren.' The Swāmī hoped that 'the spiritual current' of all devotees 'will vitalize at least to a little extent the thought life of Europe. The Power that manifested itself through Ramakrishna–Vivekananda must come to Europe also'.[28]

Further, the correspondence reflects Swāmī Yatīswarānanda's ceaseless travels, his search for disciples and to meet people, the planning of new trips, the formation of teaching groups, his need to stay overnight with friends (rather than in hotels), and getting his trips paid for by well-wishers. Edith organized numerous such contacts and facilitated the Swāmī's stay in different places. While Edith Geheeb was probably irreplaceable for Swāmī Yatīswarānanda on this practical level, his spiritual counsel proved immensely meaningful to Edith. Especially in the first three or four years, that is, during her initial years in Switzerland which were loaded with hardship, she seemed to depend strongly on his guidance. She was deeply committed to making progress in her spiritual life; in fact, according to Swāmī Yatīswarānanda, she showed an exaggerated eagerness to get spiritual results. In a letter of 14 July 1935, he wrote to her succinctly:

> The Lord will give you all that you need in course of time. You have come to Ramakrishna and he will never disappoint you.
>
> You have got many problems to solve in connection with your school and other affairs. This means a great strain on you. That is the reason why I do not wish you to have further strain caused by intensive spiritual practice. I know your soul hunger is growing. Through the

[27] Letter by Swami Yatiswarananda to Edith Geheeb, dated 6 July 1935, from Wiesbaden (HLA HStAD O 37/977).

[28] Letter by Swami Yatiswarananda to Edith Geheeb, dated 11 February 1937, from Zürich (HLA HStAD O 37/977).

> grace of the Divine it will certainly be appeased. But you shall have to proceed not too fast. Considering all these points I told you not to be too greedy in spiritual matters. Spiritual striving always brings an amount of reactions. Great mental energy is liberated and we must be able, through preliminary training, to control and direct it along higher lines. This can be done effectively when we are in a more or less settled state physically and mentally. So the aspirant should not be in a great hurry, but should proceed slowly and steadily.[29]

Swāmī Yatīswarānanda also occasionally mentioned Alwine von Keller, Emma von Pelet, the Sharmas, Aurobindo Bose, and Wolfram Koch whenever he met them or received their letters. In 1937, Swāmī Yatīswarānanda congratulated Edith Geheeb on the inauguration of the Ecole d'Humanité. On 7 July 1940, he, for the first time, wrote from New York:

> I came to Europe in November 1933 with the option of going back to India after six months. Soon after my arrival I felt I may have to stay six years. After having stayed for six years & six months, I came to have the feeling that my pioneering work is over. Hereafter when the war is over, probably some of our Swamis would come to Europe, learn the different languages and work in the different countries.[30]

Perhaps, he wrote, he would return to Europe, accompanying younger monks and to give them advice.

During Swāmī Yatīswarānanda's years in the USA, his correspondence with Edith Geheeb petered out. There was no letter between 1940 and 1945; and then another gap up to 1949 and then to 1953. The Swāmī assured her, 'Although we did not exchange any letters all these years, I have been remembering you in my prayers since the first time you very kindly accommodated me in your school.' And he continued, 'May the Lord bless you for everything you did for me and the Cause.'[31] Edith Geheeb reciprocated this sentiment of gratitude wholeheartedly. She wrote, 'I shall never forget how

[29] Letter by Swami Yatiswarananda to Edith Geheeb, dated 14 July 1935, from Campfer, Engadin (HLA HStAD O 37/977).

[30] Letter by Swami Yatiswarananda to Edith Geheeb, dated 7 July 1940, from New York (HLA HStAD O 37/977).

[31] Letter by Swami Yatiswarananda to Edith Geheeb, dated 31 December 1949, from Gretz (France) (HLA HStAD O 37/977).

much you meant for my inner development, and I always feel how all that you gave me at the Odenwaldschule, at Wiesbaden and at Geneva is still alive.'[32]

By that time, Swāmī Yatīswarānanda had already returned to India. He routed his return journey via Europe, spent a few months meeting his former disciples in several countries, but he was unable to meet Edith Geheeb, as both mentioned with regret. The Swāmī commented, 'The whole of India is before me and I find much greater scope for service here than in Europe and America.'[33]

The monk slowly abandoned the idea of revisiting Europe. Instead, Edith mentioned, probably for the first time, tentatively and couched in an exclamation of writing about the impossible, that she would like to visit India. 'How I wished I could go to India once, but this will hardly be possible during this life.'[34] In the 1950s and 1960s, the correspondence between Edith Geheeb and the Swāmī dwindled to a trickle. Just one letter each of 1954, 1957, 1960, and 1965 exists. In 1966, the then general secretary of the Rāmakrishna Math and Mission informed Edith Geheeb of Swāmī Yatīswarānanda's demise (on 27 January 1966). Edith did indeed visit India in the winter of 1965–6 and made several attempts to meet Swāmī Yatīswarānanda. But to her great regret she missed him both in South India and in Belur Math.[35] His final letter to Edith was written on 30 December 1965 from Belur Math.[36]

The second monk of the Rāmakrishna Mission with whom Edith Geheeb established close contact was *Swāmī Nikhilānanda* (1895–1973). He was a direct disciple of Srī Sāradā Devī, the consort of Srī Rāmakrishna. In 1933, Swāmī Nikhilānanda founded the Ramakrishna–Vivekananda Center of New York and remained its head until his death.[37]

[32] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Swami Yatiswarananda, dated 4 May 1953, from Hasliberg Goldern (HLA HStAD O 37/977).

[33] Letter by Swami Yatiswarananda to Edith Geheeb, dated 14 May 1953, from Ootacamund (HLA HStAD O 37/977).

[34] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Swami Yatiswarananda, dated 8 April 1957, from Hasliberg Goldern (HLA HStAD O 37/977).

[35] See Näf, *Paul und Edith Geheeb–Cassirer*, pp. 521–2.

[36] HLA HStAD O 37/977.

[37] See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swami_Nikhilananda. Retrieved on 30 September 2018.

The monk made pertinent contributions to the literature of the Rāmakrishna Movement. He translated the Bhagavad Gita, a selection of the Upanishads, and wrote the biographies of Srī Sāradā Devī and Swāmī Vivekānanda. Most important was his translation of Sri Rāmakrishna's conversations with his disciples, the five-volume *Srīsrī Rāmakrishna Kathāmrita*, from Bengali to English. It was especially this book, Swāmī Nikhilānanda's *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (1942), which was instrumental in making Sri Rāmakrishna known outside the confines of the Bengali-speaking population. Swāmī Nikhilānanda's over 1000-page œuvre has been re–translated into other languages, so also into German, either in full or in a concise edition, and has therefore influenced countless spiritual seekers globally.[38]

For a few months in 1934, soon after having founded his centre in New York, Swāmī Nikhilānanda visited Europe, apparently in order to connect with Rāmakrishna-devotees in Europe. Once again it was Edith Geheeb who supported an Indian monk during his travels in Europe, arranging contacts for him, organizing private accommodations, and the like. In July, he spent ten days with Edith Geheeb at the Institut Monnier near Geneva. Apparently, at that time, Edith's marriage with Paulus was, once again, going through rough weather; Paulus even talked about divorce. The Indian guest was able to teach Edith the appropriate attitude of detachment vis-à-vis her troubles. Edith later mentioned that the monk helped her 'in an indescribable way in difficult years'.[39] Other swāmīs would come to visit Edith Geheeb in the years to come.

The correspondence between Edith Geheeb and Swāmī Nikhilānanda began in 1934, soon after the school had been shifted to Switzerland, and was lively until 1936. The correspondence thereafter shows long gaps; especially during World War II the two were out of touch. Already in 1935, when the dark clouds of war had not yet gathered on the European horizon, Swāmī Nikhilānanda wrote, 'I keenly realize that a great fury of hatred and misunderstanding is let loose in Europe today. ... We have had enough of destructive criticism. Let there be some positive thinking. The question is not to discover how

[38] See Kämpchen, 'Sri Ramakrishna: The Bridging of Two Cultures'.

[39] Näf, *Paul und Edith Geheeb–Cassirer*, p. 519.

much evil there is in the world, but to discover how much good we can do to the world.' Against this background, the Swāmī highlighted the positive, humane spirit prevalent in the school run by Paul and Edith Geheeb. In the same letter the erudite, articulate monk launched into an explication of his vision of spiritual unity, a vision which Swāmī Yatīswarānanda, too, would incessantly preach in his letters. These are echoes of lectures delivered by Swāmī Vivekānanda some four decades earlier. Swāmī Nikhilānanda wrote:

> [T]he people are becoming open and receptive to new aspects of truth. Comparative religion has shattered the belief that morality or spirituality is the exclusive property of any one nation, race or creed. Thoughtful people everywhere are becoming alive to the fact that humanity as a whole must march together or it will perish. Science and modern resources have placed at our disposal all the ingredients for such a grand synthesis. The only thing we require is a keen understanding, by which we can weld together these ingredients into a harmonious whole. Great thought and small minds do not go together.[40]

In 1936, Swāmī Nikhilānanda again visited Europe and dropped by the Geheebs near Geneva. The next letter to Edith Geheeb preserved in the archive was written ten years later, in 1946, that is, after World War II. It begins, 'During the past terrible five years I thought of you many times and asked many refugees about you and the school. But I did not get any information. To-day I am thrilled to see your letter published in the Life magazine. I am so happy to get your news and to know that you are carrying on your great work.' After asking 'a thousand questions' about Paul Geheeb and the school, he continued:

> Every time I think of Europe I feel a pain in my heart. I know brave souls like you have been doing their utmost to revive the soul of Europe. ... The whole world is in for a big change. I feel so convinced that the malady of the world is spiritual. Aggressive evil can be met only by aggressive goodness. Science or technology or statesmanship cannot transform evil nature with good. That impulse must come from the soul of man.

[40] Letter by Swami Nikhilananda to Edith Geheeb, dated 7 January 1935, from New York (HLA HStAD O 37/978).

It sounds like a desperate cry when he concluded, 'It is not enough to say that the world is one. We must live and act as if the humanity is one and the soul is divine.'[41]

From this year onwards, letters became more frequent again. The next year, in 1947, Swāmī Nikhilānanda expressed his great joy of getting news about the school and its improved situation at Hasliberg Goldern. He highlighted his joy by writing a few lines which must have deeply impressed Edith as this seems to be at the core of her own realization. A penciled exclamation mark is visible on the margin.

> As the present confusion in Europe subsides, your noble work will be more and more recognized by the people. Your work is divinely endowed. Its chief support is your sacrifice and righteousness. Sri Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita that those who are devoted to the welfare of others do not come to grief. No matter what happens to them outwardly, they always have an inner satisfaction from the consciousness that they are acting as God's instruments.[42]

After the war, the Swāmī travelled twice to Europe (1948 and 1956) and visited the Ecole each time. The correspondence continued with intermittent prolonged gaps until 1973, the year of Swāmī Nikhilānanda's death in New York. As in the case of Swāmī Yatīswarānanda, Edith Geheeb expressed her gratitude to Swāmī Nikhilānanda on several occasions: '[Y]ou are always a part of my spiritual life, and have meant a great deal to my inner growth.'[43] And again, concluding a letter of 1960, she sends 'an everlasting expression of gratitude for the strength you developed in my being which enables me to see my way clearly and to seek the light unfalteringly, never losing my courage even in dark moments'.[44]

[41] Letter by Swami Nikhilananda to Edith Geheeb, dated 8 August 1946, from New York (HLA HStAD O 37/978).

[42] Letter by Swami Nikhilananda to Edith Geheeb, dated 12 April 1947, from New York (HLA HStAD O 37/978).

[43] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Swami Nikhilananda, dated 29 June 1953, from Hasliberg Goldern (HLA HStAD O 37/978).

[44] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Swami Nikhilananda, dated 6 October 1960, from Hasliberg Goldern (HLA HStAD O 37/978).

Swāmī Nikhilānanda had on several occasions reciprocated this praise and appreciation. In a handwritten, undated letter which seems to have been his last to Edith, he wrote:

> The memory of the happy time we spent together in the school and at Zürich is always green in my mind. It is a distinction and a privilege to cultivate your acquaintance. You are doing such a noble work. It is only work of this kind that seems like [a] redeeming feature of a sordid world. It is so tragic to see how we are losing step by step all idealism of life. ... The present day world shows such a lack of clear thinking. Sometimes I become hopeless about the future of our civilization. ... I also believe that what is narrow and parochial in our culture will pass away. But what is universal will abide forever. ... As your school stands for the universal ideal, it will exert its beneficial influence upon mankind for a long time to come.

The Swāmī concluded his letter by voicing a beautiful idea which strongly follows the ideals of Swāmī Vivekānanda, and which must have indeed attracted Edith.

> Can you build a temple in your School which will be the Sanctuary of this universal ideal of religion? In this temple the sincere souls of all religions will get the inspiration to quicken their individual spiritual life. It will be above all creeds and dogmas.[45]

Only once a letter was not appreciative; in fact, it was mildly critical. That was the letter she wrote to Swāmī Nikhilānanda after she had visited Belur Math. I shall quote from this letter when I narrate Edith Geheeb's experiences in India.

The Nehru–Gandhi Family in Switzerland (1953)

The connection the Ecole enjoyed with the Nehru–Gandhi family has been described in the German-language literature about the Geheebs and the Ecole. But has there been any mention of it in the numerous English biographies of Jawaharlal Nehru and of the members of the Gandhi family? It is well-known and it has been described in some detail that Jawaharlal Nehru's wife Kāmalā, who suffered from

[45] Letter by Swami Nikhilananda to Edith Geheeb, undated, from New York (HLA HStAD O 37/978).

tuberculosis, was taken to Switzerland for treatment and a change of climate. In 1926, Jawaharlal accompanied her to Geneva where, after a year, she recovered. In May 1935, Kāmalā's health deteriorated again, and she was once again sent to Switzerland by her doctors. This time her daughter Indira took her. Finally, Kāmalā died in February 1936 in Lausanne.

Two decades later, in 1953, Indira sent her two sons to the Ecole for some weeks. Jawaharlal Nehru, accompanied by his daughter Indira Gandhi and her two young sons, travelled to Europe to attend the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in London. This was to be followed by a conference of all Indian ambassadors in Europe at the famed Swiss Hotel Bürgenstock, overlooking Lake Lucerne, presided over by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. The two sons were to stay at the Ecole (Figure 3.3a), which is approximately a two-hour drive from Lake Lucerne. The Indian diplomat Jagat Singh Mehta, at the time first secretary of the Indian Embassy in Berne, organized the conference. This is how Mehta remembers the episode:

> On the way to London, Mrs Indira Gandhi had left her sons Rajiv, nine, and Sanjay, six, in Switzerland. I had met the Air India flight in Geneva and driven them to the Odenwald School[46] run by Paul Geheeb in a small valley in the Bernese Oberland. This was an unusual school where learning was combined with adventure and exploring of nature. Geheeb had first established the school in the Black Forest,[47] but as a protest against Hitler's National Socialism he had moved the school to this obscure village in Switzerland. ... I dare say few in India except Panditji [Jawaharlal Nehru] and Indira Gandhi had heard about the school. Fortunately, I had come across some information on arrival in Bern and had invited Paul Geheeb to our flat in Switzerland in 1951 and so, when I brought the PM's grandsons for a few weeks' stay, I was not a complete stranger.
>
> Mrs Gandhi went straight from Bern to Paul Geheeb's school, stayed two days, and then brought her sons to Burgenstock after the Conference concluded.[48]

[46] The school was, of course, the Ecole d'Humanité.

[47] The school was originally situated in the Odenwald (not in the Black Forest) in Germany. When Jagat Mehta visited the school, it had already shifted to Switzerland and renamed Ecole d'Humanité.

[48] Mehta, *The Tryst Betrayed: Reflections on Diplomacy and Development*, pp. 85–6.

Figure 3.3a Paul Geheeb with Rajiv and Sanjay Gandhi in the Swiss mountains (1953)
Source: HLA HStAD O 37 B6 No. 73.

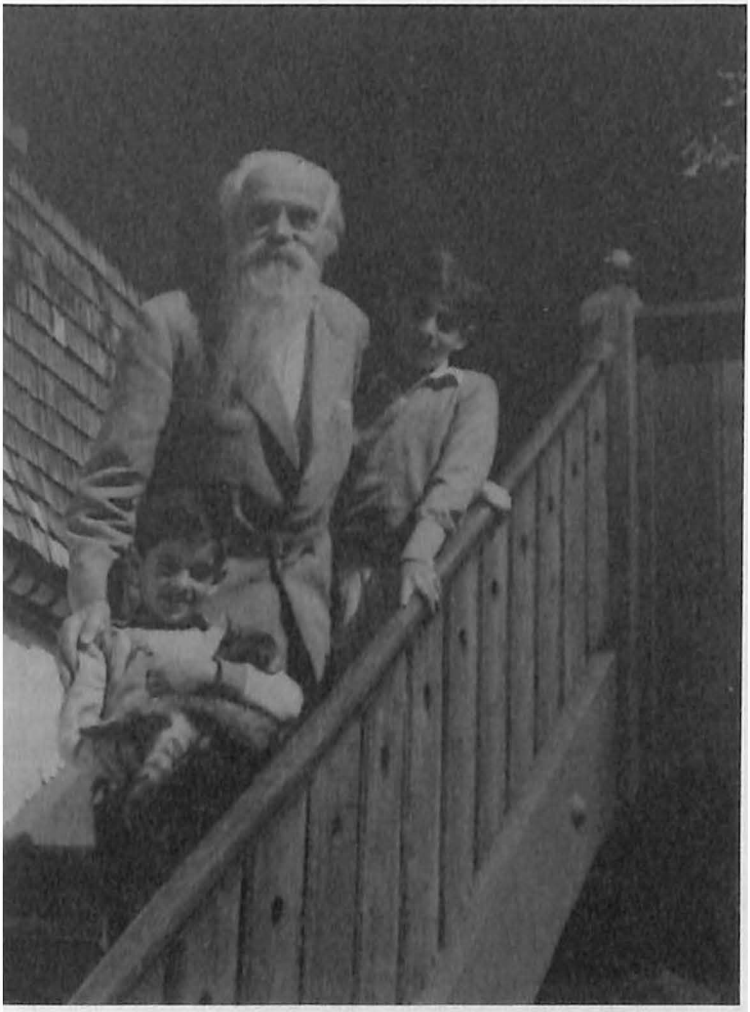


Figure 3.3b Paul Geheeb with Rajiv and Sanjay Gandhi at the Ecole (1953)
Source: CollMK.

In the pictorial biography of Rajiv Gandhi, his wife Sonia Gandhi included a photo with the two boys Rajiv and Sanjay standing next to Paul Geheeb on the wooden steps of an external staircase (Figure 3.3b). The caption of the photo is: 'In May 1953, Indira accompanied Jawaharlal to London to attend the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. Rajiv and Sanjay spent part of the summer in Goldern (Switzerland) at the "Ecole d'Humanite" run by the famous educationist Paulus Geheeb.'[49]

Interestingly, the same photo appeared in the biography of Sanjay Gandhi, Indira Gandhi's younger son, written by his wife Maneka Gandhi. Here, the caption is even briefer: 'Rajiv and Sanjay in Switzerland, 1953, with Professor Paul Geheebe [*sic*], at whose school they spent a month.'[50]

So it appears that Indira Gandhi visited the Ecole with her two children, driven there by Jagat S. Mehta, and spent a week at the school. Because in a letter to Henry R. Cassirer, Edith Geheeb wrote, 'It has been confirmed that Mrs. Gandhi will arrive here on 28 May with her children and spend herself one week.'[51] Henry, the journalist, wanted to bring out the story in a newspaper. Edith warned her cousin not to break the story while Indira and her two sons remained in the Ecole as Indira wished no publicity. On 9 August, Indira Gandhi again visited the school to collect her two sons.[52]

The Geheebs formed a splendid impression of Indira Gandhi. 'Highly educated. True human aristocracy' was Paul Geheeb's comment in a conversation with Adolphe Ferrière.[53] Jawaharlal Nehru who had been in Europe with Indira, did not, however, visit the Ecole with her.[54]

[49] Sonia Gandhi, *Rajiv*, p. 41.

[50] Maneka Gandhi, *Sanjay Gandhi*, photo no. 112.

[51] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Henry Cassirer, dated 15 April 1953, from Hasliberg Goldern (HLA HSTAD O 37/255). ['Es ist jetzt abgemacht, dass Mrs. Gandhi mit den Kindern hier am 28. Mai eintrifft, und selbst eine Woche hierbleibt.']

[52] See Näf, *Paul und Edith Geheeb–Cassirer*, p. 719.

[53] See Näf, *Paul und Edith Geheeb–Cassirer*, p. 719. ['Hochgebildet. Wahre menschliche Aristokratie.']

[54] See Näf, *Paul und Edith Geheeb–Cassirer*, p. 719.

How did this connection between the Nehru–Gandhi family and the Ecole come about? Martin Näf comments:

> It is evidence of the variety and intensity of contacts which have existed since a long time between the Geheebs and India that Nehru and Gandhi chose the Ecole d'Humanité when they were looking for a school for Rajiv and Sanjay to attend. As Nehru and Gandhi themselves had a close relationship with the Ramakrishna Movement and with Tagore and his Visva-Bharati University, the name of Geheeb had been familiar to them since long.[55]

Already in December 1952, Indira Gandhi was looking for a school to admit her two sons. She knew a Dutch–English couple, Mr and Mrs Hopman, whose three children had been students at the Ecole, and contacted them. A carefully worded request by an Indian diplomat, A.C.N. Nambiar, was sent to Paul and Edith Geheeb: '[T]wo children belonging to a distinguished family in India and held in terms of great honour and affection in our country may be coming to Europe about May next. In this case they would like to spend about three months in your educational institute.'[56] Through Mr and Mrs Hopman, the Geheebs already knew who the 'distinguished family' was. Edith confirmed to A.C.N. Nambiar, 'Of course we shall only be too happy to have the grandchildren of your Prime Minister in our house.'[57] In his response, Nambiar evoked the relationship with Tagore that Indira Gandhi, as an erstwhile student at Sāntiniketan, and the Geheebs shared. In her first letter directly to Indira Gandhi, Edith assured her, 'Please do not think that we shall use your little boys as show-pieces; they will lead here the right kind of life in a home-like and

[55] Näf, *Paul und Edith Geheeb–Cassirer*, p. 720, note 1306. ['Dass Nehrus und Gandhis Wahl ausgerechnet auf die Ecole d'Humanité fiel, als sie für Rajiv und Sanjay eine Schule in der Schweiz suchten, ist ein Beleg für die Vielfalt und Intensität der Kontakte, welche seit langem zwischen den Geheebs und Indien bestanden. Aufgrund von Nehrus und Gandhis eigener Nähe zur Ramakrishnabewegung und zu Tagore und seiner Visva–Bharati Universität war ihnen der Name Geheeb seit langem ein Begriff.']

[56] Letter by A.C.N. Nambiar to Edith Geheeb, dated 14 December 1952, from Geneva (HLAHStAD O 37/1131).

[57] Letter by Edith Geheeb to A.C.N. Nambiar, dated 16 December 1952, from Hasliberg Goldern (HLA HStAD O 37/1131).

warm atmosphere and get all the advancement in their learning which you may wish.'[58] Edith immediately launched into the question of food which is of such importance in an Indian context, assuring Mrs Gandhi, 'We have never had any difficulties in the food question with children and adults coming from India; they always felt at ease with our food.'[59]

Next came a handwritten letter by Indira Gandhi to Edith, dated 26 May 1953 (Figure 3.4). By then Edith and Indira had met, and judging from the affectionate tone of this letter and all the subsequent ones which the two women exchanged, they had taken a liking to each other. This letter began, 'My dear Edith. The few days I spent in Goldern were so peaceful and lovely. In don't know how to thank you enough for your kindness in making me feel completely at home.' She told of a party in Geneva which brought the Indian community together, and then continued:

> I hope the children are feeling more settled. I have left some pills on the dressing table. The smaller boy is to take one pill after breakfast every day. I am sending two stamped & addressed envelopes to Rajiv. Could you please persuade him to write every Saturday–or any one day in the week.

Indira Gandhi poured out her praise for the school thus.

> Confucius said[,] 'It is better to light one small candle than to curse the darkness.' I feel that Paulus and you are doing just that. It was delightful to see the friendly happy atmosphere of your school—if only others could borrow some of your light, perhaps we could dispel the darkness of cold wars and conflicts all over the world.

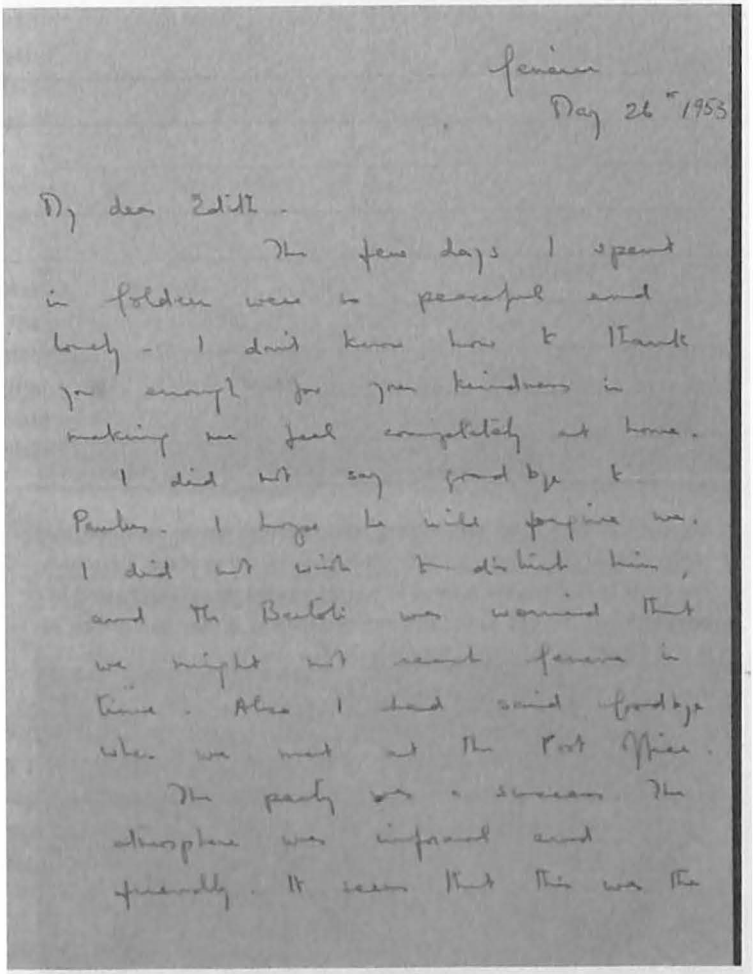
She concluded by suggesting: 'Will you not please call me Indu—which is what I am called by my family and friends. It means moon!'[60]

Indira Gandhi's swift, brief letter from Moscow of 1 July, again handwritten, informed Edith Geheeb that she would be arriving at

[58] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Indira Gandhi, dated 26 February 1953, from Hasliberg Goldern (HLAHStAD O 37/1131).

[59] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Indira Gandhi, dated 26 February 1953, from Hasliberg Goldern (HLAHStAD O 37/1131).

[60] Letter by Indira Gandhi to Edith Geheeb, dated 26 May 1953, from Geneva (HLA HStAD O 37/1131).



Geneva
Day 26th 1953

My dear Edith -

The few days I spent in Goldern were so peaceful and lovely - I don't know how to thank you enough for your kindness in making me feel completely at home.

I did not say good bye to Paulus. I hope he will forgive me. I did not wish to disturb him, and Frau Berlit was worried that we might not reach Geneva in time. Also I had said good bye when we met at the Post Office.

The party was a success. The atmosphere was informal and friendly. It seems that this was the

Figure 3.4 Indira Gandhi's letter to 'My dear Edith' (1953); page 1 of 3
Source: HLA HStAD O 37 No. 500.

Goldern on 9 August to take her sons back. The Hessische Staatsarchiv in Darmstadt has preserved three letters by Edith addressed to 'Indu', dated 8 June, 4 July, and 1 August 1953. These long, typed letters reported on Rajiv's and Sanjay's well-being in the school. 'It is time that I give you good news again about your two dear little boys. They

charm and attract everyone who comes into our house, and I feel they are quite content with us.'[61] She continued to tell about an eight-day excursion in which the two boys would be included, about their social contacts in the school, and their 'cooperative and helpful' attitude as they 'do not shirk a single duty'.

Edith also mentioned that she and Paulus look forward to the reception on 16 June in Geneva for Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi which they would attend (Figures 3.5 and 3.6).

She invited both father and daughter to join them driving back to Goldern together to meet Rajiv and Sanjay. This, however, did not happen. In a letter, Paul Geheeb referred to their brief meeting with Jawaharlal Nehru calling him 'a great, in conversation charmingly natural and simple, modest man'.[62] In the same letter Paulus wrote about Indira Gandhi's visit to the Ecole. He invited her to accompany him on one of his day-long mountain excursions.

> My wife admonished me somewhat anxiously not to maltreat this sophisticated lady who is used to travel[ling] by car or plane, too much. But such apprehension proved to be unfounded. Mrs Gandhi and her boys enjoyed the day to the hilt and behaved as if they had grown up in the jungle, they roamed through the forest with me and climbed up and down the rocks.[63]

Edith's second letter tells about a 'costume play' in which Rajiv and Sanjay had taken part at the Ecole. The third letter, written a few days before Indira would take her sons back, relates how outgoing and 'exuberant' the two boys had become. 'Rajiv and Sanjaya are full of gay spirits all day and approach each activity with great

[61] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Indira Gandhi, dated 8 June 1953, from Hasliberg Goldern (HLA HStAD O 37/1131).

[62] Paul Geheeb, 'Eurasischer Händedruck', p. 53. ['großen, im Verkehr entzückend natürlich-einfachen, bescheidenen Mann']

[63] Paul Geheeb, 'Eurasischer Händedruck', p. 54. ['Meine Frau ermahnte mich etwas ängstlich, diese feine Dame, die doch gewohnt ist, sich im Auto oder Avion fortzubewegen, nicht zu sehr zu schinden; die Befürchtung erwies sich als unbegründet. Mrs. Gandhi und ihre Jungens genossen den sonnigen Tag auf's glücklichste und benahmen sich, als wären sie im Dschungel aufgewachsen, stromerten mit mir durch den Wald und kletterten die Felsen hinauf und hinunter.']

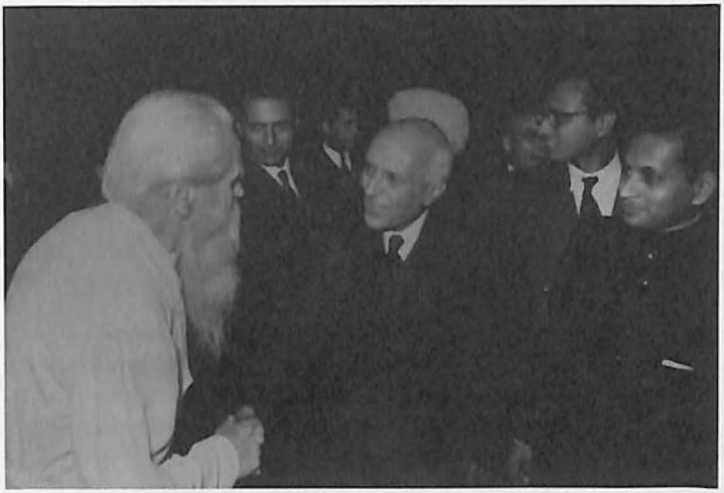


Figure 3.5 Paul Geheeb meets Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in Geneva (1953)
Source: HLA HStAD O 37 B6 No. 63.

Figure 3.6 Paul and Edith Geheeb meet Indira Gandhi and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in Geneva (1953)
Source: HLA HStAD O 37 B6 No. 63.

enthusiasm and joy.'[64] They had picked up some German in the school, but soon they would leave, Edith wrote, and forget it again. A tinge of sadness permeates the letter because of their imminent departure.

Another time, almost two years after this event, Indira Gandhi sent a handwritten letter remembering her days at the Ecole d'Humanité. 'How often I think of those peaceful days spent in the beauty of Goldern.' Her five-page letter mentioned that she had 'known great unhappiness' since her visit, and that she had been very ill as well (Figure 3.7).

> Now it has become such a vicious circle that I do not know if I am ill because I am so depressed or whether I am so depressed because I am ill! Actually what happened was that in order to forget certain things I took on more and more work and responsibility and was incessantly travelling and working on a number of projects all day and far into the night. All the time the exhaustion was piling up and without my realizing it I was heading towards a breakdown.

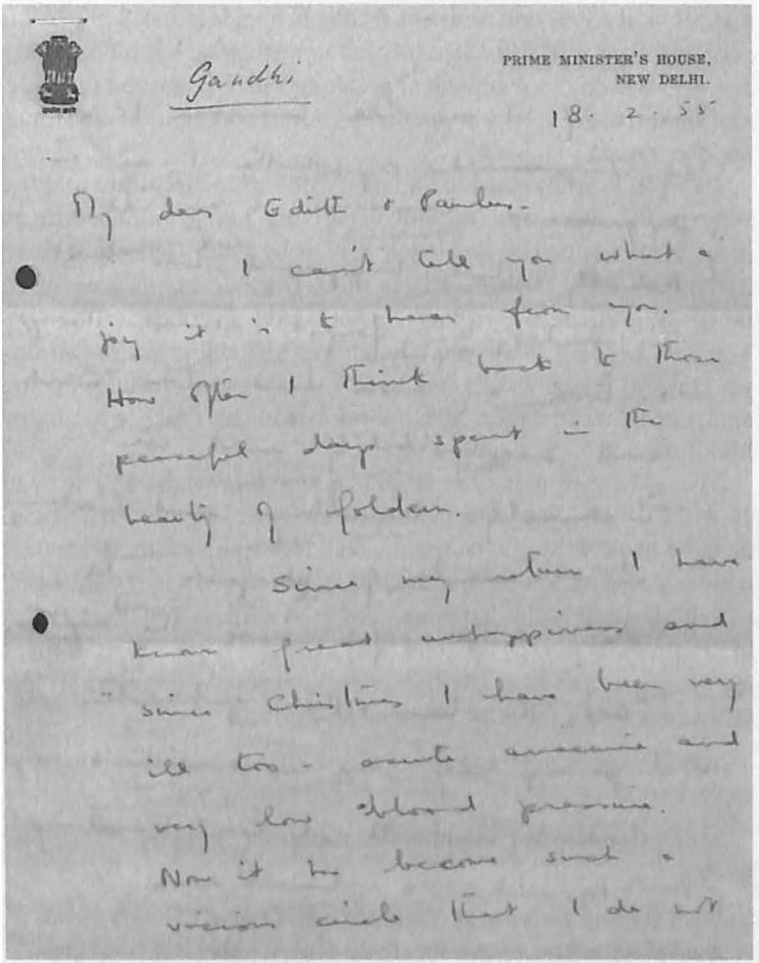
Indira, writing very much as a mother, told Edith that 'the boys are in school in Dehra Dun'. She expressed her unhappiness about the school which 'has so much "public school" atmosphere', but she saw no alternative. 'Rajiv is not one to speak out so he "seems" to have settled but the little one isn't at all happy and writes many letters telling me that he loves me very much. This is probably a discovery he has made since our parting!'

Indira told about her engagement with children and projects supporting children, with projects involving the preservation of folk arts, and about the 'constant stream of visitors of all kinds.' The last paragraph about scientists sets the sombre mood of the entire letter. She wrote, 'Having helped to discover & develop the Atom Bomb and other monstrosities they are now afraid that the "Monster" is out of their control.'[65]

The rest of the letters are typical 'keeping-in-touch letters' from both sides. The archive has a letter of almost every year. Edith inquired

[64] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Indira Gandhi, dated 1 August 1953, from Hasliberg Goldern (HLA HStAD O 37/1131). The name has been Sanskritized as 'Sanjaya' throughout this correspondence.

[65] Letter by Indira Gandhi to Edith Geheeb, dated 18 February 1955, from New Delhi (HLA HStAD O 37/1131).


Gandhi

PRIME MINISTER'S HOUSE,
NEW DELHI.

18. 2. 55

My dear Edith & Paulus.

I can't tell you what a joy it is to hear from you. How often I think back to those peaceful days spent in the beauty of Goldau.

Since my return I have had great enthusiasm and since Christmas I have been very ill too - acute anaemia and very low blood pressure. Now it has become such a vicious circle that I do not

Figure 3.7 Indira Gandhi's letter to Edith and Paul Geheeb (1955); page 1 of 5
Source: HLA HStAD O 37 No. 501.

about the children, Rajiv and Sanjay. She regularly expressed her happiness with the children of the Ecole whose company she continued to enjoy as she grew older. There were exchanges of Christmas and New Year greetings, and Edith mentioned some reports on Nehru in the newspapers. Edith opined that Rajiv and Sanjay 'would really need

a more individual environment. ... I can imagine that Rajiv, in his self-controlled way, will adapt himself nevertheless; but for Sanja[y]'s nature it will be more difficult to get along with strange and uncongenial circumstances. No wonder that he now is conscious of how much he loves you!'[66]

Rarely did Edith conclude a letter without inviting Indu and her sons to the Ecole and without expressing her genuine desire to meet them again. The last letter, written by Edith Geheeb, is dated 23 January 1962. It begins, 'Dear Indu, Once again you have given me great pleasure by sending me your kind greetings for the New Year and I cannot thank you enough that you still count me among your friends. I shall hardly ever be able to express my feelings for you and your father in words. Meeting you has meant much to me in my life.'[67]

The archive contains two letters related to Jawaharlal Nehru. On 16 August 1956, Paul and Edith Geheeb invited him to their school in order to allow him to take some rest. It is an invitation Nehru was unable to honour. On 22 March 1960, Nehru signed a letter addressed to Paulus sending him 'greetings and good wishes ... on the occasion of his attaining the age of 90 years. His life and his work has brought joy to large numbers of children and young people' (Figure 3.8). The statesman adds a touching personal observation:

> There can be no richer experience than to give and receive love. That is the truest foundation for the peace we strive for.[68]

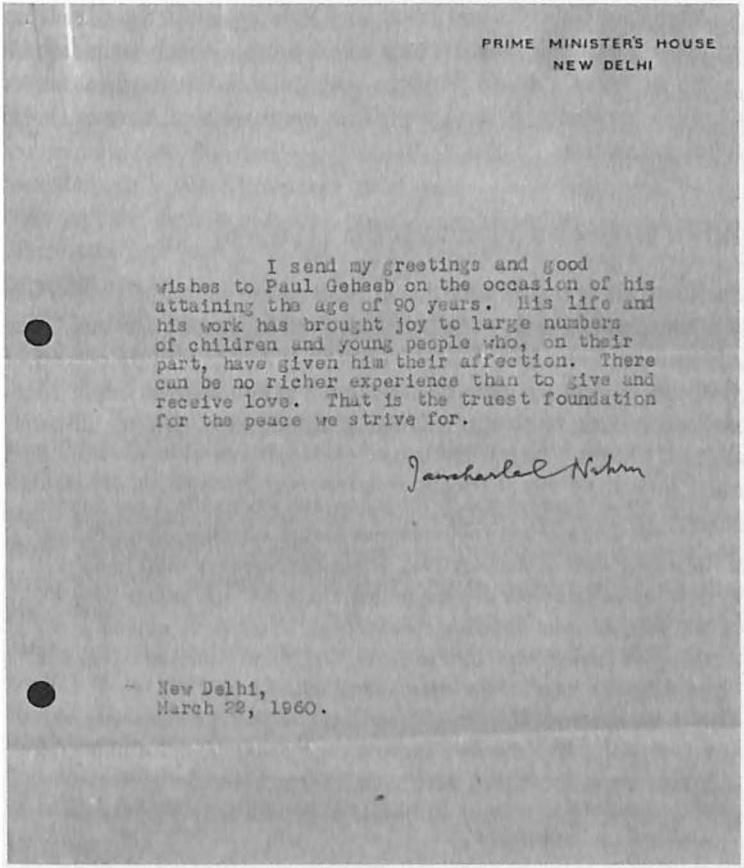
Indira Gandhi, too, congratulated Paulus on his 90th birthday. She wrote:

> It is a privilege for me to be counted as one of Paulus Geheeb's friends and I gladly add my voice to the chorus of good wishes which will greet him on his 90th birthday.

[66] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Indira Gandhi, dated 16 June 1955, from Hasliberg Goldern (HLA HStAD O 37/1131).

[67] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Indira Gandhi, dated 23 January 1962, from Hasliberg Goldern (HLA HStAD O 37/1131).

[68] Letter by Jawaharlal Nehru to Paul Geheeb, dated 22 March 1960, from New Delhi (HLA HStAD O 37/974). Published in Eva Cassirer, Wolfgang Edelstein, Walter Schäfer (eds), *Erziehung zur Humanität*, p. 9.



PRIME MINISTER'S HOUSE
NEW DELHI

I send my greetings and good wishes to Paul Geheeb on the occasion of his attaining the age of 90 years. His life and his work has brought joy to large numbers of children and young people who, on their part, have given him their affection. There can be no richer experience than to give and receive love. That is the truest foundation for the peace we strive for.

Jawaharlal Nehru

New Delhi,
March 22, 1960.

Figure 3.8 Jawaharlal Nehru on Paul Geheeb's 90th birthday (1960)
Source: HLA HStAD O 37 No. 974.

Paulus is a person of deep perception and courage. His attempt to translate his ideals into reality has been a valuable contribution in the field of education and to the cause of better understanding and peace amongst nations.[69]

[69] Letter by Indira Gandhi to Paul Geheeb, dated 31 March 1960, from New Delhi (HLA HStAD O 37/500).

After Paul Geheeb's and Jawaharlal Nehru's death, the friendship with Indira Gandhi was revived when Edith Geheeb visited India in the winter of 1965–6. While in New Delhi, Edith stayed at Indira Gandhi's residence as her guest. This event we shall narrate in the following section.

Edith Geheeb's Visit to India (1965–6)

For Edith Geheeb, the long trip to India in the winter of 1965–6 was a fulfillment of a dream she had nourished for several decades. Since Alwine von Keller had undertaken her trip to India in the winter of 1929–30, it had been Edith Geheeb's wish to follow her example. In an important letter to Swāmī Nikhilānanda, she explained her situation thus.

> I was for decades needed by the school and Paulus that I could never consider making such a pilgrimage as Alwine. After the beloved Paulus, well-aged, died in the year 1961, it was of course my most important duty to lead this work into the future. I have the luck, to have won Mr. and Mrs. Lüthi as directing collaborators, who already worked under and with Paulus. Mr. Lüthi is Swiss, Mrs. Lüthi American. That is a good combination for our international school.
>
> I am now over 80 years old, and am glad that the main work and responsibility for the school is carried by these two, so dear to me. So I could undertake for the first time to be absent from here for months, and I dreamed of coming to such profound religious experiences as Alwine found in India.[70]

Edith Geheeb never had the opportunity of taking up university studies when she was young. In an advanced age, however, she began taking Sanskrit lessons, she studied the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads, and other scriptures zealously. She had begun studying with V.N. Sharma at the Odenwaldschule and later kept up her study with others in Switzerland, including with the swāmīs of the Rāmakrishna Mission who arrived as guests. So she was spiritually as well as intellectually equipped to appreciate and evaluate the genuineness of the religious reality which she would encounter in India.

[70] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Swami Nikhilananda, dated 25 March 1966, from Hasliberg Goldern (HLA HStAD O 37/978).

Perusing the correspondence between Edith Geheeb and Shrīmatī Tagore, it becomes clear that it was she and her husband, Saumyendranāth, who were the principal driving force behind Edith's decision to visit India. At the end of a long, friendly relationship and correspondence, this decision gradually matured. Edith and Shrīmatī maintained a correspondence with each other until the 1970s, although the stream of letters came down to a trickle in the 1930s. Shrīmatī's marriage in January 1937, however, warranted a special letter. It proudly mentioned that Saumyendranāth Tagore had been 'in Germany for [a] long time & is the grand-nephew of Rabindranath, the Poet'.[71] The 1940s and 1950s produced no letters, but in 1962, there was a spurt of correspondence. Towards the end of that year, Shrīmatī Tagore visited Germany and Switzerland and, of course, met Edith Geheeb in the Ecole. Paulus had expired several months earlier. After a lapse of three decades, Shrīmatī and Edith met again and reconnected spontaneously. 'I missed Paulus but sitting in his study, surrounded by so many people whom he honoured and loved, I felt his spirit everywhere.' Then she mentioned her relationship with Edith: 'It was a revelation how our kindred spirits understood each other and how near we are to each other.' And finally, Shrīmatī warned Edith, tongue in cheek, 'You know we have decided that I should kidnap you to India!! So be prepared!'[72]

Thus the idea of Edith visiting India was born. The next year, Saumyendranāth, too, urged Edith to visit India and stay with them in Kolkata.[73] As the pressure mounted, she made a categorical statement.

> It is like this: Since many, many years I yearn to experience India not merely spiritually—that is, from Europe—and in earlier times I would very much have loved to travel [to India]. But now so many things are in front of my soul like a mountain which I can no longer climb. ... Besides, I have so many friends in India, and I fear that such a journey

[71] Letter by Shrimati Tagore to Paul Geheeb, dated 25 May1937, from Ahmedabad (HLA HStAD O 37/992).

[72] Letter by Shrimati Tagore to Edith Geheeb, dated 26 November 1962, from Paris (HLA HStAD O 37/992).

[73] See Letter by Saumyendranath Tagore to Edith Geheeb, dated 16 March 1963, from Calcutta (HLA HStAD O 37/992).

> would once again mean what I actually wish to avoid when I am on vacation: people, people, people.[74]

'Take your time, but come you must.'[75] That was the tenor of successive letters to Edith. Even Aurobindo Bose joined in the chorus. The emotional pressure on Edith increased when Shrīmatī and Saumyendranāth arrived in Europe for another visit in October 1964. Shrīmatī mounted some exhibitions of her paintings in Germany and in Paris, while Saumyendranāth apparently came as a businessman. Both visited Edith in Goldern. The letters express joy on both sides. Conversations must have revolved around Edith's India visit. The promise of the Tagores to organize her trip and even pay for it must have been the reason that Edith gradually changed her mind and finally consented. On 16 December 1964, that is, a full year before her anticipated trip, she wrote:

> If you really hold on to your decision to send me the flight ticket, then I consider to make the trip to India perhaps at the end of 1965 before Christmas. (Without this I should not be able to afford this journey as I have too many obligations towards the school and our teachers and our children.) I would then first visit the Sharmas in Madras.[76]

Gradually, Edith had the trip all planned out, even brief visits to Israel and Greece on the way back. But what about her health? Her age? She would soon be 80! What about the plans the Tagores might have for the next year? Would she endure the heat? For quite some time, Edith vacillated between rejection and acceptance, between

[74] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Shrimati Tagore, dated 26 June 1963, from Hasliberg Goldern (HLA HStAD O 37/992). ['Es ist nun so: Ich habe seit vielen, vielen Jahren die Sehnsucht gehabt(,) Indien nicht nur geistig zu erleben—also von Europa aus—und ich wäre früher sehr gern gefahren, aber jetzt steht mir so vieles wie ein Berg vor der Seele, den ich nicht mehr erklimmen kann. ... Auch habe ich so viele Freunde in Indien und ich fürchte(,) eine solche Reise würde wieder das von Neuem bedeuten, dem ich eigentlich hier zu entgehen suche, wenn ich Ferien mache: Menschen, Menschen, Menschen.']

[75] Letter by Shrimati Tagore to Edith Geheeb, dated 21 September 1963, from 'Bombay on way to Calcutta' (HLA HStAD O 37/992).

[76] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Shrimati Tagore, dated 16 December 1964, from Hasliberg Goldern (HLA HStAD O 37/992).

anticipation and a kind of disbelief that she indeed had taken this bold decision. Throughout 1965, there was a flood of letters between the Tagores and Edith planning this momentous trip in every detail. In Goldern, Aurobindo took an active part in charting out the itinerary. But even a month short of her departure to India, she continued to have misgivings. To the Sharmas in Madras she would write:

> But I do not wish to burden anyone with my presence. India has always been a poor country. For somebody who is receptive for the fate of others it is probably never quite easy to travel in this country as a visitor, to witness much misery without being able to help.[77]

A further uncertainty was created by the outbreak of the India–Pakistan War in mid–August 1965. Would travel within India be affected? Was it wise to undertake this trip at such a moment? Finally, Edith decided take the trip.

She landed in Bombay on 27 November 1965. After spending several days in Bombay, she proceeded on a trip to the Ajanta and Ellora Caves. After returning to Bombay, she flew to Madras (present-day Chennai) where she, after many years, met V.N. Sharma and his wife Ellen Teichmüller-Sharma who had started the Children's Garden School following the Odenwaldschule–Sāntiniketan model. From Madras, Edith flew to Kolkata, staying with Shrīmatī and Saumyendranāth Tagore. She visited Belur Math. There, Edith missed meeting her ailing and bed-ridden spiritual guide, Swāmī Yatīswarānanda. So weak was he that he no longer was allowed to see devotees. The Swāmī was prepared to make an exception for Edith. In his very last letter to her, he wrote, '[I]t will [be] a pleasure for me to see you even for a minute. Kindly come here any day between 4.30 and 5.30 p.m. informing us beforehand of the exact date and time of your visit to this place.'[78] This meeting did not take place.

[77] Letter by Edith Geheeb to V.N. and Ellen Sharma, dated 18 October 1965, from Hasliberg Goldern (HLA HStAD O 37/987). ['Ich möchte doch niemanden mit meiner Anwesenheit belasten. Indien ist ja immer ein armes Land, und für jemanden, der empfindsam ist für die Schicksale anderer, ist es wohl nie ganz leicht, als Gast durch dieses Land zu fahren(,) viel Elend sehen zu müssen und nicht helfen zu können.']

[78] Letter by Swami Yatiswarananda to Edith Geheeb, dated 30 December 1965, from Belur Math (HLA HStAD O 37/977).

Alwine von Keller's trip had taken her all around India. Edith, too, visited the east and west of the northern plains of India as well as southern India. Yet, Alwine's focus seems to have been Belur Math, the Motherhouse of the Rāmakrishna Math and Mission. As she had been in close contact with several swāmīs of this order, and, moreover, as Alwine von Keller had reported in superlative terms about her experiences in Belur Math, Edith, too, had hoped to have her crowning experience there. This was not to be. As she explained in a letter to Swāmī Nikhilānanda:

> I have occupied myself for so many years with India, and Mrs. v. Keller led me to a pure fountain: to the Ramakrishna Mission, which for me, in the truest sense, has embodied Vedanta. I remember so well the time when Alwine von Keller came back from India ... and how much she could tell us about the atmosphere in Belur Math and the inner religiousness of the monks.

Edith Geheeb then expressed her disappointment with the Rāmakrishna Mission, or more precisely with Belur Math, politely, but honestly and in no uncertain terms:

> In Calcutta I undertook immediately the journey to Belur Math—may I admit to you openly that I was very disillusioned! I searched in vain for the simplicity of which Alwine had spoken. The great temple did not interest me, holy places dear to me, such as the great tree under which Shri Ramakrishna prayed, were protected by fences. The Holy Mother's simple little chamber had become a shrine. ... I [am] not writing all this to complain, but because I see it was my fate that this so deeply wanted experience was not granted to me. It seems to be my task, to seek and to find Vedanta and India in my own heart.[79]

From Kolkata, Edith made a trip to Sāntiniketan where she was, once again, a guest of Shrīmatī Tagore; upon her return to Kolkata, the Tagores played host. Edith made an excursion to Bhubaneswar, Konark, and Puri. Thereafter, she flew from Kolkata to Delhi, where she was accommodated in the residence of Indira Gandhi.

This stay is historically memorable as it happened when Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri suddenly died and Indira Gandhi, then

[79] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Swami Nikhilananda, dated 25 March 1966, from Hasliberg Goldern (HLA HStAD O 37/978). Underlined text is as in the original.

a minister in the Indian government, was chosen to succeed him. From Delhi, Edith Geheeb made a trip to Agra and Mathura. She flew on to Ahmedabad and finally back to Bombay. This round trip, which the 80-year-old Edith undertook alone and without the modern amenities to which we are used to today, must be seen as a feat of physical and mental stamina.

Almost every other day, Edith wrote letters to Aurobindo Bose describing her experiences. He had taken part in preparing Edith for this trip, telling her what to see and whom to meet. I shall now follow these letters which are written frankly and in great detail, to showcase the high points of the trip and the meaning they had for Edith. They are a moving testimony of a woman of mature age who fulfills her life's wish to witness the India of her dreams.

The round trip seems to have been excellently prepared because at each stop Edith was received by friends who could guide her to places of tourist interest and introduce her to Indian society. We see that as soon as she touched down in Bombay, she was in the care of friends and moved around with them, attending a performance of classical dance on the very first day and visiting Elephanta Island on the second. On 29 November, she confessed to Aurobindo, 'I cannot tell you much—it would be too much—and my language is not enough to describe to you the many, many impressions of the last 2 days.'[80] In the same letter, she, for a second time, felt overwhelmed when she tried to express her experience at Elephanta: 'The Trimurti [is] of quiet greatness—what to say?—I was deeply moved. What [so far] I dreamed of, now [becomes] reality.'[81]

This tenor of surprise and wonder continued in the letters that followed. She felt overpowered by ever-new impressions. The caves in Ajanta and Ellora 'virtually shook' and overwhelmed her due to their 'wealth'. She used plane, train, and bus to reach there and then

[80] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Aurobindo Bose, dated 29 November 1965, from Bombay (HLA HStAD O 37/984). ['Ich kann nicht viel erzählen—es wäre zu viel—und meine Sprache reicht nicht(,) Dir die vielen, vielen Eindrücke zu schildern der letzten 2 Tage.']

[81] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Aurobindo Bose, dated 29 November 1965, from Bombay (HLA HStAD O 37/984). ['Die Trimurti von stiller Grösse—was soll ich sagen?—ich war tiefbewegt. Erträumtes nun Wirklichkeit.']

return. 'The poverty of the many, many people is unimaginable.'[82] This, too, was an observation which recurred often.

In Madras, Edith stayed with the Sharmas and their two youngest daughters, Gita and Sakunthala, for about ten days. She mentioned visiting the Rāmakrishna Math, but she was rather unimpressed by the ritual puja which she witnessed, while she described and praised the Theosophical Society at Adyar—the magnificent banyan tree earned a special mention—and the school for classical Indian dance, Kalakshetra, of Rukminī Devī Arundale at length.

In Kolkata, Edith was received by Shrīmatī and Saumyendranāth Tagore with whom she stayed at 4, Elgin Road. Edith felt that they treated her 'royally'.[83] Together with Shrīmatī and Saumyendranāth, she went to visit the house of Jagadīs Chandra Bose and Lady Bose. It is the house which Aurobindo Bose used to live in during his youth, so Edith described this visit at greater length.

On 19 December, she wrote from Sāntiniketan, where she was again received with 'warmest cordiality'[84] by Professor Mohan Lal Bajpai and a girl student who had previously studied at the Ecole. Edith was 'wonderfully accommodated' in one of the university guest houses.[85] She was shown the campus; she enjoyed the sunset, the abundance of flowers, and 'the warmth of feeling' at Bajpai's house.[86] She witnessed a song-and-dance performance by the students, she visited the museum (which she described as 'wunderbar', or wonderful), and enjoyed the old photos depicting Tagore ('man kann sich garnicht satt sehen' [one cannot get enough of it]) and one morning

[82] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Aurobindo Bose, dated 3 December 1965, from Bombay (HLA HStAD O 37/984). ['war ich geradezu erschüttert von dem Reichtum des zu Sehenden'; 'Die Armut der vielen, vielen Menschen ist unvorstellbar.']

[83] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Aurobindo Bose, dated 16 December 1965, from Kolkata (HLA HStAD O 37/984). ['Es ist ein königliches Unterkommen.']

[84] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Aurobindo Bose, dated 19 December 1965, from Santiniketan (HLA HStAD O 37/984). ['mit wärmster Herzlichkeit empfangen']

[85] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Aurobindo Bose, dated 19 December 1965, from Santiniketan (HLA HStAD O 37/984). ['wunderbar untergebracht']

[86] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Aurobindo Bose, dated 19 December 1965, from Santiniketan (HLA HStAD O 37/984). ['eine so warme Stimmung']

prayer. The vice chancellor, Sudhi Ranjan Das, called on her, and she also met Pratimā Tagore, Rabindranath's daughter-in-law,[87] and her adopted daughter, Nandinī.

Edith Geheeb's impressions of Sāntiniketan were altogether positive. She was not sparing with praise. 'Everything is well looked after with much love—and yet kept so simple, of which I am so fond.'[88] Her next letter, dated 22 December, reports, 'Yesterday I returned from Santiniketan, deeply moved and fulfilled.'[89]

Edith next went back to Kolkata, where she met different members of the extended Bose family, and then to Bhubaneswar, Puri, and Konark. Her generally positive attitude faltered with respect to Puri. While she did appreciate the temple architecture in Konark and Bhubaneswar and admired its spiritual symbolism, she wrote, 'Puri was terrible, worst possible superstition, abominable market place with [images of] demonic faces, pilgrims which [were] horrible to perceive, filth, poverty, scorching sun...'[90]

Back in Kolkata, she received the information that Alwine von Keller had expired. Consoled that it was a peaceful death, she nonetheless expressed her sense of loss and confirmed that even Paulus' death in January 1961 still 'burns in me' like on the day of his death.[91] In that same letter, Edith announced that from 12 January

[87] Pratima Tagore wrote a letter to Edith Geheeb from Santiniketan, dated 25 December 1965, expressing her happiness at her 'wonderful' visit (HLA HStAD O 37/992).

[88] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Aurobindo Bose, dated 19 December 1965, from Santiniketan (HLA HStAD O 37/984). ['Es ist hier mit viel Liebe alles so gepflegt—und dennoch einfach, das ist so schön.']

[89] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Aurobindo Bose, dated 22 December 1965, probably from Kolkata (HLA HStAD O 37/984). ['Ich kam gestern aus Santiniketan zurück–tief bewegt und erfüllt.']

[90] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Aurobindo Bose, probably end of December 1965, most likely from Kolkata (HLA HStAD O 37/984). ['Puri war entsetzlich, schlimmste Superstition, grässlicher Markt mit Fratzengöttern billigster Nachahmung, Pilger furchtbar zum Ansehen, Schmutz, Armut, heisse Sonne.']

[91] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Aurobindo Bose, dated 2 January 1966, from Kolkata (HLA HStAD O 37/984). ['aber unser Schmerz, der gehört eben uns; auch der Verlust von Paulus' Gegenwart (worüber ich kaum je spreche) brennt in mir wie am Todestage.']

1966 she would be 'with Indu', meaning that she would stay in Indira Gandhi's residence in Delhi. Aurobindo Bose had been instrumental in getting Edith Geheeb this invitation.

Before she left for Agra and Delhi, not to return to east India again, Edith Geheeb twice made special mention of Saumyendranāth Tagore who created a deep impression on her. She saw in him 'a highly eminent human being' invested with 'benevolence', 'prudence', and 'originality'.[92] In another letter written around the same time, she called Saumyendranāth 'a stunning fellow' who attracted as much love as irritation.[93]

Edith Geheeb's next letter, written on 12 January 1966, a day after she arrived in Delhi, began with, 'I sit in Indira's garden.' Then followed, 'It is the day on which Shastri has been brought to the cremation ground.'[94] All of a sudden Edith Geheeb had—inadvertently—been catapulted into the centre of the political landscape, while a dramatic moment of Indian history was being played out.

In 1964, Lal Bahadur Shastri had taken over as the Indian prime minister after Jawaharlal Nehru's death. Shastri's efforts to make peace with Pakistan led to a Peace Pact which he signed in Tashkent (then in the USSR) with Pakistan's President Mohammed Ayub Khan. The 'Tashkent Declaration' was signed on 10 January 1966. Shastri died in the early hours of 11 January of a heart attack. The body was brought to Delhi and cremated the next day, which was the day when Edith Geheeb arrived in Delhi to stay with Indira Gandhi.

She had been president of the Congress Party and, as his unofficial private secretary, had helped her father, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, in executing his duties. After Nehru's death, she was appointed member of the Rajya Sabha and became the minister of information and broadcasting in Lal Bahadur Shastri's cabinet.

[92] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Aurobindo Bose, dated 3 January 1966, from Kolkata (HLA HStAD O 37/984). ['Ich halte Sho(umya) für einen hochbedeutenden Menschen'; 'Güte', 'Klugheit' and 'Originalität'.]

[93] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Aurobindo Bose, probably end of December 1965, most likely from Kolkata (HLA HStAD O 37/984). ['ein doller Kerl']

[94] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Aurobindo Bose, dated 12 January 1966, from New Delhi (HLA HStAD O 37/984). ['ich sitze in Indiras Garten; Es ist der Tag von Shastries (*sic*) being brought to the cre(m)ation ground.'] This letter was eight pages long.

When Edith Geheeb wrote her long letter, 'Indu' was present at the cremation ground. Edith commiserated,

> Poor Indu, within just a few years [she experienced] so much pain: 1960 her husband died (to whom she was apparently quite strongly attached, according to the information of the friendly, intelligent woman secretary, she worked with her since 11 years), 18 months ago Nehru's death, her departure from the Prime Minister's house, before that agonising months worrying about her gravely ailing father, then assumption of the ministerial post, and now the sudden death of Shastri—a terrible shock for everyone.[95]

She continued describing the present situation:

> Indu was woken up at night around 3 o'clock when Shastri's death became known. She then had an arduous day until late in the evening. I saw her only for 20 minutes around 7:30 devouring some fish and meanwhile reading some telegrammes, giving orders to one official after another. Then she again drove off.[96]

Finally, Edith added some personal comments on Indira Gandhi.

> Indu has aged a great deal. (It is, after all, 12–13 years since I saw her[.]) She is very frail and her face resembles that of an old wise woman. Of course, she must have specially grieved yesterday. Her two sons are in England—one she last saw 10 months ago, the other 7 months ago—really a difficult life. The house is enchanting, it

[95] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Aurobindo Bose, dated 12 January 1966, from New Delhi (HLA HSTAD O 37/984). ['arme Indu—innerhalb weniger Jahre so viele Qualen: 1960 Tod ihres Mannes (an dem sie anscheinend, nach Aussage der freundlichen, klugen Sekretärin—11 Jahre mit ihr arbeitend—doch sehr hing)(,) vor 18 Monaten Nehrus Tod, ihr Auszug aus dem Prime Minister(')s house—vorher sorgenvolle Monate um den schwer leidenden Vater—dann Übernahme des Ministerpostens—und nun der plötzliche Tod Shastri(')s—ein fürchterlicher Schock für Alle.']

[96] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Aurobindo Bose, dated 12 January 1966, from New Delhi (HLA HSTAD O 37/984). ['Indu wurde in der Nacht um 3 Uhr geweckt, als Shastri(')s Tod hier bekannt wurde, sie hatte dann einen schweren Tag bis spät abends—ich sah sie nur 20 Minuten gegen ½8 etwas Fisch herunterschlingen, dazwischen Depeschen lesend, Anordnungen gebend an einen Beauftragten nach dem anderen. Dann fuhr sie wieder fort.']

> has just 4 rooms and a staff room (also a lobby for the policeman watching). When the boys come, they have their things in 'my room', but they sleep in their mother's room. Then there is only a sitting room and a dining room, but it has many verandahs and corners where one can withdraw oneself. A large garden—many wonderful artefacts—mostly gifts from e.g. Russia and Africa—and beautiful Indian bronzes. The poor mistress of this precious home [is] a prudent woman, but beaten down by life. ([I]t was hell, she told me, when she briefly told about her life[)] ... and the agony of this hell one can read on her face.[97]

In a second letter from New Delhi, dated 16 January 1966, Edith repeated her sense of alarm about Indira Gandhi being 'totally devoured' by the people around her at this time of transition.

Edith Geheeb did not forget to describe to Aurobindo Bose her visits to Agra, Mathura, and Vrindavan which had preceded her stay in Delhi. While she felt critical of the kind of piety exhibited in Mathura and Vridavan, she was all praise for the Taj Mahal: 'The Taj Mahal exudes a magic that is difficult to withdraw oneself from. ... All is of a perfection and greatness [which is] almost impossible to bear.'[98]

[97] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Aurobindo Bose, dated 12 January 1966, from New Delhi (HLA HSTAD O 37/984). ['Indu ist sehr gealtert (es sind ja auch 12–13 Jahre, dass ich sie sah)(.) Sie ist sehr zart und das Gesicht sieht eher einer alten Frau weisen Frau ähnlich. Natürlich muss sie gestern besonders vergrämt gewesen sein. Ihre Söhne [sind] beide in England—einen sah sie zuletzt vor 10 Monaten, den anderen vor 7 Monaten–wirklich ein schweres Leben. Das Haus ist bezaubernd(,) hat nur 4 Zimmer und Adjudanten Raum (Noch eine Vorhalle for the policeman watching)—wenn die Jungens herkommen, haben sie ihre Sachen in „meinem" Zimmer, schlafen aber bei der Mutter–dann ist da nur noch ein Sittingroom und ein Esszimmer–aber viele Veranden und Eckchen, wo man sich zurückziehen kann. Grosser Garten–viele wunderbare Kunstwerke—meist Geschenke aus Russland z.B. und Africa—und schöne indische Bronzen. Die arme Herrin dieses precious homes [ist] eine kluge, aber vom Leben geschlagene Frau (it was hell, sagte sie mir, als sie von ihrem Leben kurz sprach[)] ... und die Qualen dieser Hölle kann man von ihrem Gesicht lesen.']

[98] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Aurobindo Bose, dated 16 January 1966, from Agra (HLA HSTAD O 37/984). ['(Der) Taj Mahal strömt einen Zauber aus, dem man sich schwer entziehen kann. ... alles ist von einer Vollkommenheit und Grösse—fast nicht zu ertragen.']

From Delhi, Edith Geheeb proceeded to Jaipur, Ahmedabad, and then reached her last stop, Bombay. Her final letter, written from Ahmedabad on 21 January 1966, discussed plans she had for a vacation with Aurobindo Bose in Greece.

This sequence of letters is remarkable in several ways. It reflects the manner in which an 80-year-old woman on her maiden visit to India was able to come to terms with that country. Astonishingly open and flexible, never adamantly set in her ways, Edith Geheeb showed a degree of readiness to absorb the new and unexpected, which is rare in her age. Despite all her preconceptions and her knowledge of India with which she anticipated her experiences, she was able to relate to the unexpected in a positive manner. Edith was a mature observer. She managed to strike a balance between critical evaluation and a generally positive, welcoming, sometimes enthusiastic view of India. However, her critical faculties never left her. Belur Math was the low point of her trip; she also criticized unequivocally the religiosity exhibited in Puri, Mathura, and Vrindavan.

Her advantage was, as mentioned, that at every place she visited she was received by native hosts who she either was acquainted with or who were friends of friends. She was accorded a VIP status almost everywhere, which was the direct fruit of her many contacts with India built up throughout her life, and naturally a fruit of the Ecole d'Humanité's eminence. In these letters, Edith Geheeb comes across as an excellent communicator whose simplicity and down-to-earth qualities served her well.

The two letters describing Edith's stay with Indira Gandhi are particularly noteworthy. Edith was not in awe of Nehru's daughter or of the minister that Indira Gandhi then was. Her letters show a woman-to-woman approach to Indira Gandhi's predicament. Not once did Edith Geheeb lose herself in imagining that Indira Gandhi might become the next prime minister. Rather, her compassion for a woman friend who had just suffered several blows of fate was genuine and straightforward.

After Indira Gandhi became prime minister, Edith expressed herself critically about several of Indira Gandhi's actions. She objected to the annexation of Goa (and wrote a carefully worded letter to Indira). She was also, as Batja Håkansson told me, unhappy about her assuming dictatorial powers during the Emergency.

To gauge the importance Edith accorded to her Indian trip, I quote from a letter to Batja Håkansson, then a girl student at the Ecole. It was Christmas Eve 1966, towards the conclusion of her journey. Edith had a touching fondness for this student because, as Edith confessed, 'I love you very much—and I cannot imagine the school without the girl who on the last day of his earthly existence took Paulus lovingly into her arms.'[99] Edith continued, 'Today is Christmas Eve—I am in India and am firmly rooted here—I wish to be nowhere else–not even today.'[100] This shows Edith's resolve to fully immerse herself in the vibrant social fabric of India even at a time when in Switzerland the Ecole celebrated the all-important Christmas festival. She concluded her letter with a remarkable sentence, which we can accept as the essence of her Indian experience: India gives me 'a very ambiguous impression—but a sense of wonder outweighs everything'.[101]

The Children's Garden School in Chennai

Dr V.N. Sharma and Ellen Teichmüller, who married in Germany in 1931 while they both stayed at the Odenwaldschule as teachers, had to leave the country due to the Nazi government which assumed power in 1933. The Geheebs left the Odenwaldschule in 1934 and migrated to Switzerland, and the Sharmas, as advised by Ellen's mother, Alwine von Keller, returned to India in 1936. A year later, on 7 September 1937, Ellen and V.N. Sharma established the Children's Garden School in Madras (Chennai) with just seven kindergarten children. However, the transition from Germany to India appears to have been

[99] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Batja Håkansson, dated [probably] 24 December 1965, from Kolkata (CollMK). ['Ich habe dich sehr lieb—und ich kann mir die Schule nicht denken ohne das Mädchen, das Paulus am letzten Tage seines Erdenlebens liebend in die Arme schloss.']

[100] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Batja Håkansson, dated [probably] 24 December 1965, from Kolkata (CollMK). ['Heute ist Weihnachtsabend—ich bin in Indien und ganz hier—ich wünsche mich nirgends anders hin—auch nicht heute.']

[101] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Batja Håkansson, dated [probably] 24 December 1965, from Kolkata (CollMK). ['(Indien) ist ein sehr zwiespältiger Eindruck—aber das Wunder überwiegt.']

fraught with difficulties of adjustment. Ellen Sharma wrote to Edith Geheeb in 1937 emphasizing how deeply the education model of the Geheebs has influenced their own efforts in Madras:

> You can hardly imagine how deeply we are connected with you in our daily life, how we receive guidance and inspiration from your work every day.

Then Ellen continued on a more sombre note:

> I am astonishingly well—Sharma, however, suffers unspeakably; but I think he must make these experiences in order to become fully independent; he feels homesick for the ideal Germany which has received him so lovingly. Now he has to struggle to get a position in India as well.[102]

In a peculiar reversal of roles, V.N. Sharma feels 'homesick for the ideal Germany'. While in Germany, Sharma wanted to live and embody the ideal India. Now, in India, disappointed by its reality, he yearns for the ideal Germany. The discourses on Orientalism declare how Europe romantically yearns for the 'ideal India'. Here an Indian intellectual yearns for the 'ideal Germany'!

The *Souvenir* published by the school in 2007 on the occasion of its 70th anniversary[103] gives a detailed, although not always quite precise, description of the development of the school from its humble beginning to the large and multi-facetted and prominent school that it is today. It is not my task here to summarize this development. Rather, I merely point out the connections the Sharmas had with Paul and Edith Geheeb and with Rabindranath Tagore.

The *Souvenirs* of 2007 as well the one of 2012[104] begin the story of the Children's Garden School's history with this dictum by Goethe:

[102] Postcard by Ellen Sharma to Edith Geheeb, no date [1937?], from Madras (HLA HSTAD O 37/986). ['Du, Ihr könnt Euch kaum vorstellen, wie tief wir täglich mit Euch leben, wie wir Maßstab und Anregung täglich neu aus Eurer Arbeit schöpfen ... Mir geht es erstaunlich gut—nur Sharma leidet unbeschreiblich; aber ich glaube, er muß diese Erfahrungen machen, um ganz selbständig zu werden; er hat Heimweh nach dem idealen Deutschland, das ihn so liebevoll aufnahm—jetzt muß er sich eine Stellung auch in Indien erkämpfen.']

[103] Children's Garden School Society, *Let None Be like Another.*

[104] Children's Garden School Society, *A Garden of Children.* This book is more in the nature of a photo book, and hence less factually informative.

> Let none be like another; yet each be like the highest.
> How can that be?
> Let each be perfect in himself.

This quotation, as we may recall, was one of Paul Geheeb's mottos. The two *Souvenirs* refer to Paul and Edith Geheeb as well as to Tagore as their dual sources of inspiration. V.N. Sharma directly mentions his indebtedness to Paul Geheeb, writing, 'It was our dream to build up an educational community which is based on the traditional culture of India's past and where we can make use of the rich experiences that we garnered from Paul Geheeb.'[105]

The elaborate description of the school's aims and its syllabus make no mention of either Geheeb or Tagore. Yet, looking at the educational emphases which were given to the Children's Garden School by its founders the influence of Geheeb and Tagore becomes apparent.

The initial vision of Ellen and V.N. Sharma was 'creating a new system of education, uniting the best of what they had learnt in Europe, with the ancient traditions and culture of India'.[106] This clearly was Rabindranath Tagore's vision as well. The Sharmas went a step beyond this: '[W]e welcome children of all races, religions and castes. All children are equally loved and no child is compelled to do anything against his or her creed.'[107] The affinity to Tagore and Geheeb becomes clearer with the statement that follows.

> The Sharmas wished to draw out the natural gifts of children—creative activity, full of fantasy and imagination. They aspired to develop the children as individuals, drawing out all the best and highest they have in themselves; and further to educate and train the children as members of the community sharing their lives with others and helping comrades as a preparation for wider and fuller services in the world.[108]

[105] V.N. Sharma, 'Unsere Schule in Indien', p. 21. ['Unser Traum war, eine Erziehungsgemeinschaft aufzubauen, die auf der traditionellen Kultur der Vergangenheit Indiens beruht, in der wir die reichen Erfahrungen benutzen, die wir von Paul Geheeb gewonnen haben.']

[106] Children's Garden School Society, *Let None Be like Another*, p. 8.

[107] Children's Garden School Society, *Let None Be like Another*, p. 13 (from the Annual Report of 1938).

[108] Children's Garden School Society, *Let None Be like Another*, p. 13.

The core of the Children's Garden School is the kindergarten with which the school began. To the Sharmas, kindergarten teaching was not a preparation for the rigours of learning to read and write, but it was meant to share the joy in painting and building, music and movement with children. There are daily dance classes. The narrative continues:

> In the early years, a great flexibility characterized class structure. ... Children were divided into groups, not necessarily of the same age, but of the same mental stage of development. A child who accomplished the tasks of one group could immediately join another stage. The Sharmas believed that [the] task of a school was not cramming information into the child, but to guide individually, encourage group work, overcome egoistic attitudes, cultivate real comradeship, provide all opportunities for developing leadership qualities and encouraging original creative individual work.[109]

'Musical dance dramas' were being performed, 'demanding cooperation, discipline, devotion and concentration',[110] which sum up some vital pedagogical virtues. Similarly, sports activities were accorded special importance. The founders laid great stress on a child-friendly atmosphere and environment which is never easy in a rapidly changing urban context. After initially moving the school to different locations, it found its present habitat on Dr Radhakrishnan Salai in the Mylapore area of Chennai.

The *Souvenirs* make frequent mention of financial difficulties and hardships. Ellen had to teach German language at Madras University to feed her family. V.N. Sharma, with his strong scholarly bend of mind, translated books from German to Telugu and vice versa.

The two direct influences of Paul Geheeb's system of education that are mentioned in the *Souvenirs* are the so-called 'Wednesday Meetings' when the teachers sit together to discuss 'strategies, new approaches and future plans', and the introduction of the course system, abandoning the class structure in which the pupils were bound to stay together throughout their school life.[111]

In the early 1970s, the school opened up to Tibetan refugee children who had originally been staying in Tibetan settlements in Karnataka.

[109] Children's Garden School Society, *Let None Be like Another*, p. 24.

[110] Children's Garden School Society, *Let None Be like Another*, p. 32.

[111] Children's Garden School Society, *Let None Be like Another*, p. 39.

The school diversified its programmes and activities in a great many ways, which need not be listed here. The school kept track of new developments in educational methodology and of modern technological advancements, for example, teaching the use of computers at an early age. When Ellen Sharma passed away on 9 June 1978, aged 78, their three daughters, Gita Sharma, the eldest, Rukmini Pappu, and Sakunthala Sharma took over the management of the school, assuring continuity as they had been part of the school and its management since childhood, as well as introducing change by offering their own individual talents and preferences. Today, Rukmini and Sakunthala continue to be the 'secretaries' of the Children's Garden School.

Dr V.N. Sharma died eight years after his wife, on 23 April 1986, in Kodaikanal, aged 89.

The one fundamental difference between the Children's Garden School, on the one hand, and the Brahmāchārya Āshram at Sāntiniketan and Paul Geheeb's two schools, on the other, is that the Children's Garden School is city-based while the others are rural. Both Rabindranath and Geheeb consciously chose the beauty of a rural setting for inspired learning. That is, the rural context was integrated to directly serve the development of the children. Flora and fauna, agriculture, rural economy, and even rural society played a constitutive role in Rabindranth's ideal of education. For Geheeb, it was predominantly the beauty and the relative isolation of both Odenwald and Hasliberg where his two schools were located, which mattered to him. Numerous extracurricular activities would never have been possible outside the rural space. The relative isolation allowed for learning with concentration away from the distractions of city life. Conversely, however, the Children's Garden School made good use of the advantages of city life. Reading about the large number of courses, programmes, and subjects that the students are able to choose from, it comes to mind that this would hardly have been possible outside the urban milieu with its multiple resources close at hand.

What is fundamentally similar, or in fact identical, in these schools is their emphasis on inclusiveness and appreciation of individual freedom. They strive towards a holistic education while giving the greatest possible amount of freedom to the individual child to develop his/her special faculties. The flexibility of the syllabus and of the course system is common to all. We remember that Geheeb had replaced the

class system by courses which accept students of different age groups. We see that the Children's Garden School follows this as well.

The link between the school in Chennai and the one in Sāntiniketan is not active. I do not hear the Children's Garden School being mentioned in Sāntiniketan; to my knowledge, no exchanges are taking place. Yet, all three existing schools have their rightful place in the modern movement that aims at freeing children from adult domination and wants to make education truly child-friendly.

4

An Indo-German Encounter

An Evaluation

This book has been written on the premise that the various meeting points and cross-currents bringing Rabindranath Tagore and the Geheebs (Figures 4.1 and 4.2) into the same cultural orbit constitute much more than a mere private conversation. Also, this conversation does not only concern the Sāntiniketan educational experiment and the Ecole d'Humanité, including the Odenwaldschule between 1910 and 1934. Rather, this book wants to show that this conversation was situated in the mainstream cultural milieu unfolding between the two World Wars and in the first decades after World War II. Martin Näf in his massive tome *Paul and Edith Geheeb-Cassirer*, from which I had occasion to quote often, has made a concerted effort to connect the Geheebs with the discourses of these periods, quoting from letters, newspapers, and books. The new dimension which I have tried to bring to this effort is the realization that this mainstream cultural discourse had a strong Indian streak. It was created by the flowing together of two contrasting—or complementary?—streams of twentieth-century Indian culture: the Rabindranath/Sāntiniketan school narrative and the Rāmakrishna Mission narrative. These two streams, in fact,

flowed into each other and merged in Germany and Switzerland. On no occasion have I read any comment by Paul or Edith Geheeb or their associates stating that the spirit of Rabindranath Tagore and the spirituality of the Rāmakrishna Order were different or even mutually exclusive. People in Europe and the USA were too distant to realize that these two streams of modern Indian culture rarely touched each other in their homeland.

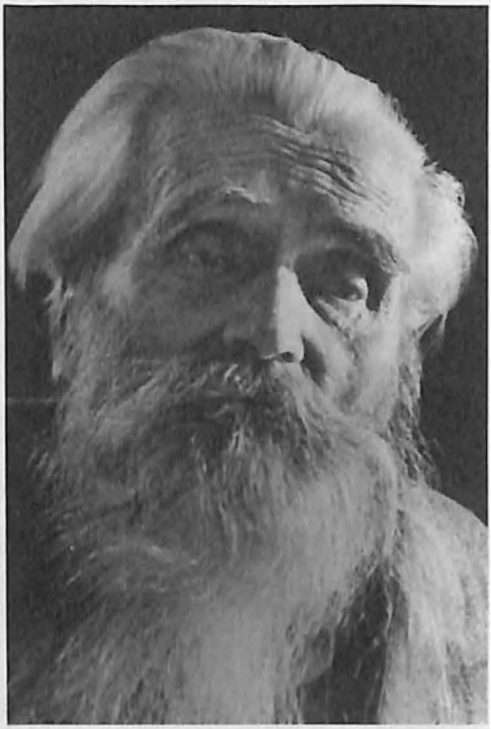


Figure 4.1 Paul Geheeb in his later life
Source: CollMK.

We have observed at length the various actors of these two narratives. Some of them have been the trailblazers of these Indian elements in Europe, such as Rabindranath Tagore and the two eminent monks Swāmī Yatīswarānanda and Swāmī Nikhilānanda. In this book I have concentrated necessarily on these main actors who surrounded Paul and Edith Geheeb. It is, however, important to realize that they drew several other well-known and highly influential personalities into their orbit, all of whom had a deep affinity to Indian culture and its spirituality. It is important to at least characterize them.

In India, Hermann Hesse is known as the author of the 'Indian novel' *Siddhartha* (1922), written after his trip to Sri Lanka and Indonesia in 1911, and his encounter and brief friendship with the

Figure 4.2 Edith Geheeb at the age of 90
Source: CollMK.

historian Kalidas Nag,[1] himself a student of Rabindranath Tagore and his companion on trips to the Far East. Hermann Hesse had a correspondence and friendship with Paul and Edith Geheeb (Figure 4.3) which is most vividly expressed in a letter Edith Geheeb wrote to Ninon Hesse, Hermann's wife, upon her husband's death. Edith wrote, 'Hermann Hesse and you have brought to Paulus as well as to our life's work so much warm affection, ... this is one of the beautiful things in life that Paul and I have experienced.'[2]

The main connection between Hesse and the Geheebs was through Paul Geheeb's brother Reinhold (1872–1939), who was the co-editor of the major satirical magazine *Simplicissimus*, a director in the publishing firm Albert Langen Verlag in Munich, and also a friend of Hesse. Edith Geheeb wrote to Hermann Hesse, as she did to Rabindranath and others, pleading help for Aurobindo Bose in his search for a position. Birthday greetings, often coupled with long handwritten letters from Paul Geheeb to Hermann Hesse are a considerable part of this correspondence. On two occasions, Aurobindo Bose was also part of this exchange. Once he asked

[1] See Kämpchen, *Hermann Hesse and Kalidas Nag: A Friendship*.

[2] Letter by Edith Geheeb to Ninon Hesse, dated 23 August 1962, from Hasliberg Goldern (HLA HStAD O 37/660). ['Dass Hermann Hesse und Sie nicht nur Paulus, sondern unserem Werk so viel Wärme entgegengebracht haben ... das gehört zu den schönsten Dingen des Lebens, die Paulus und ich erlebt haben.']

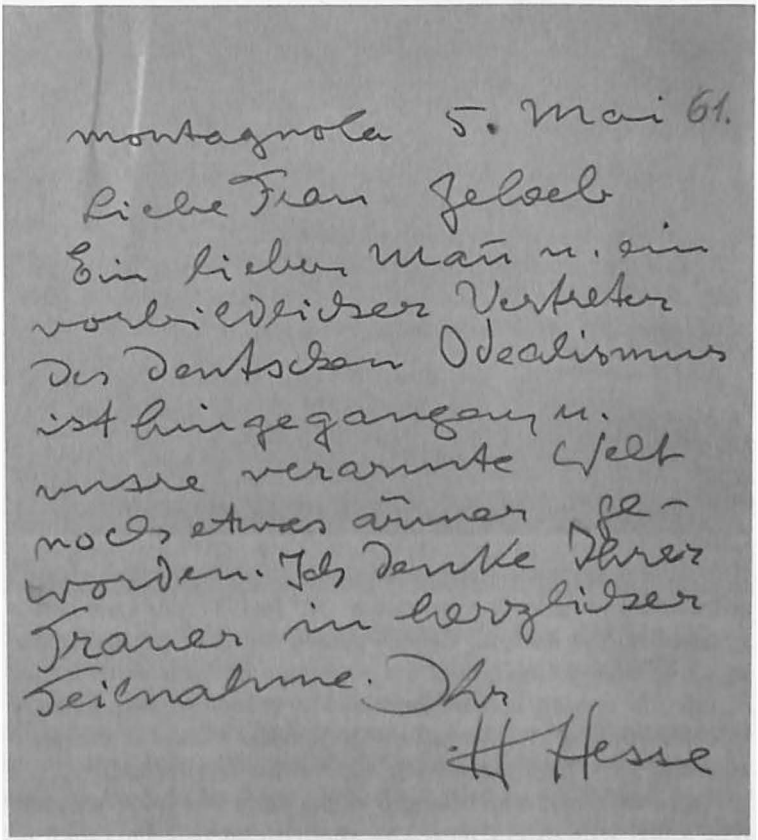


Figure 4.3 Hermann Hesse's letter to Edith Geheeb, condoling Paul Geheeb's death (1961)
Source: HLA HStAD O 37 No. 660.

whether Hesse would allow his (Hesse's) letter to Nimai Chatterjee on Rabindranath Tagore to be reprinted in Aurobindo's English translation of *Later Poems of Tagore*.[3] Hesse gave his permission readily.

[3] See letter by Aurobindo Bose to Hermann Hesse, dated 4 March 1959, from Taormina (HLA HStAD O 37/660). Originally published in Hesse, *Antworten*, p. 29', republished in English translation as a kind of preface in Rabindranath Tagore, *Later Poems of Tagore*.

In 1960, Aurobindo asked Hesse to suggest Paul Geheeb for the Nobel Peace Prize. Hesse complied and wrote a recommendation, following it up with a letter to Aurobindo.

> Respected Mr Bose,
>
> You will have to be content with a short reply; my energy does not measure up to the daily demands on it.
>
> I shall write to Oslo as you have requested.
>
> Your kind letter has brought back various memories of Tagore and Keyserling, of friend Romain Rolland, also of Kalidas Nag who like you has been a student of Tagore und who once was my guest here.[4]

Albert John Lutuli, the South African freedom fighter against apartheid, received the prize that year. Such a suggestion had been voiced earlier as well, in 1952. Paul Geheeb was nominated as a candidate, but Albert Schweitzer received the Nobel Peace Prize.[5]

Romain Rolland was another such companion with whom Paul Geheeb felt united in a common spirit. They met in the summer of 1926, and, ever since, Geheeb felt that Rolland was a 'comrade-in-arms' in the struggle for a peaceful world.[6] In 1939, while war clouds amassed on the horizon, Geheeb poured out his heart to Rolland in a long letter telling him of the precarious situation of his school. Slander, the urgency to move the school to yet another place, financial troubles—this was the scenario then. Romain Rolland replied on a postcard, 'L'Europe a perdu la tête' (Europe has lost its head).[7]

There are others who belonged to this circle who deserve a mention: Albert Schweitzer (Figure 4.5), whom Paulus visited in Lausanne in 1936; also Charles Freer Andrews (Figure 4.4), the British friend

[4] Letter by Hermann Hesse to Aurobindo Bose, no date; received on 18 January 1960, from Montagnola (HLA HStAD O 37/660). ['Sehr geschätzter Herr Bose, Sie müssen sich mit einer kurzen Antwort begnügen, meine Kräfte sind den täglichen Anforderungen nicht mehr gewachsen. Nach Oslo schreibe ich in Ihrem Sinne. Ihr lieber Brief hat mich an manches erinnert, an Tagore und Keyserling, an Freund Romain Rolland, auch an Kalidas Nag, der gleich Ihnen zu Tagores Schülern gehörte und einst mein Gast war.']

[5] See Näf, *Paul und Edith Geheeb–Cassirer*, pp. 716–17.

[6] See Näf, *Paul und Edith Geheeb–Cassirer*, pp. 649–50.

[7] Letter by Paul Geheeb to Romain Rolland, dated 28 January 1939, from Les Pléiades sur Blonay (HLA HStAD O 37/875).

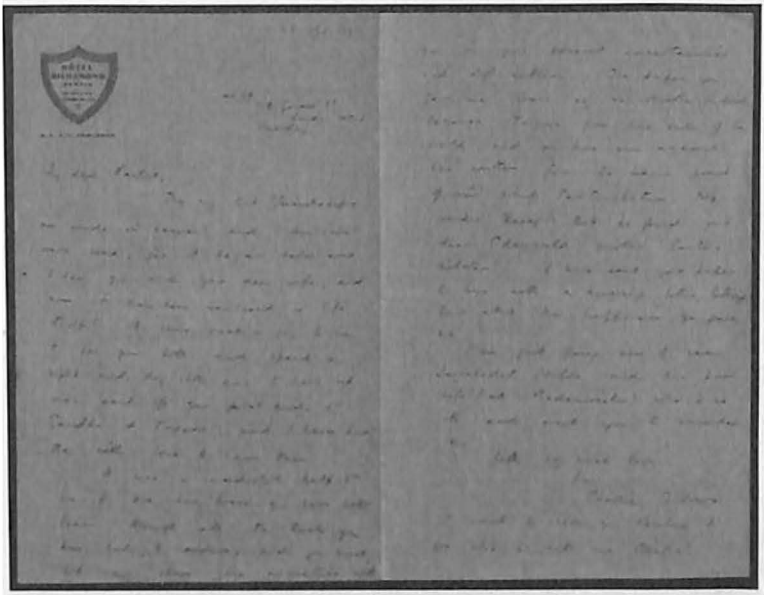


Figure 4.4 Charles Freer Andrews's letter to Paul Geheeb (1935)
Source: HLA HStAD O 37 No. 35.

of both M.K. Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore, who promised help for the school through the British Quakers during its worst tribulations, in 1939. Klaus Mann (1906–1949), the son of Thomas Mann, the writer, had been a student of the Odenwaldschule in 1922–3 for a short while; he wrote about the school and kept in touch with his revered teacher Paul Geheeb until his early death. Besides, there were a host of educationists in Switzerland, France, and Germany who maintained their bond with the Geheebs and their school.

How much Paul Geheeb indeed depended on those personalities who jointly kept burning the flame of a humane European spirit with a universal vision can be gauged from the words he uttered during the concluding months of World War II in a letter to Adolphe Ferrière: 'Tagore dead, Rolland dead. Would that Albert Schweitzer, who has already turned 70, remain in good health and full of creativity!'[8]

[8] Quoted from Näf, *Paul und Edith Geheeb–Cassirer*, p. 650. ['Tagore tot, Rolland tot. Möge Albert Schweitzer, der jetzt auch schon 70 Jahre alt

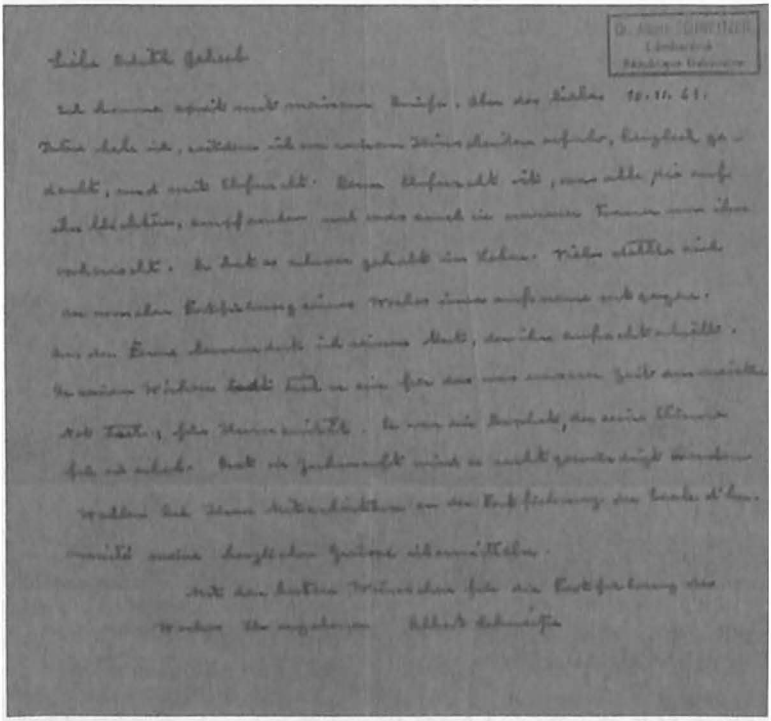


Figure 4.5 Albert Schweitzer's letter to Edith Geheeb condoling Paul Geheeb's death (1961)
Source: HLA HStAD O 37 No. 976.

This idea of a 'humane European spirit with a universal vision' ought to be fleshed out more accurately. In Chapter 1 the importance of Goethe, Humboldt, and others of the German classical humanistic tradition has been stressed. Paul Geheeb received his nourishment from them as a student, and in gratitude he named the houses of the Odenwaldschule after these classical writers and scholars. Beauty and truth were their guiding poles along with a life of morality. Extremes

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geworden, noch lange gesund und schaffensfroh bleiben', letter dated 21 March 1945.]

of patriotism, nationalism, and militarism were ruled out. The horizon opened up to new cultures and other religions. This idealistic trend of incorporating 'the Other' was in evidence in the educational ideas of both Paul Geheeb and Rabindranath Tagore.

However, against this background of German Idealism, the *personal* was, in fact, what propelled these two educational experiments forward and gave them their features of uniqueness. What do I mean? Both Paul and Edith Geheeb had a great talent of letter-writing. It was their special vocation. After perusing numerous correspondences archived in the Ecole and later in the Hessische Staatsarchiv, Darmstadt, I am under the impression that this personal activity of letter-writing was enormously important for the decisions about the direction the school should take. Probably, letter-writing gifted to the Ecole its many dedicated, often inspired, teachers and the institution's continuity until today.

The regular discussions of the several committees run by the teachers and the students are the second defining element which gives the Ecole its structure until this day. In both cases it is the personal, the individual human-to-human contact which created and continues to strengthen the backbone of the school.

The Indian element which Paul and Edith Geheeb added to their educational philosophy following the inspiration Rabindranath Tagore and the Rāmakrishna Movement gave to the Ecole brought a widening of their mental horizon towards the realization of the spirit permeating through humans, nature, and the cosmos. It is the celebration of the spirit's unlimited vastness which is at the core of both Rabindranath's and Swāmī Vivekānanda's religious testament. Classical German humanism and the modern definition of Vedanta, as the Rāmakrishna Order formulated it, melted into one and created a fascinating energy.

As to Rabindranath Tagore, the personal dominated his relationship with his students too. Until the end of his life, he conducted classes in his school and university by according maximum importance to a strong and healthy teacher–student relationship. One of his educational principles has been that teachers were to inspire and not merely instruct their students. The teachers should be a model whose example the students may follow. This principle was deduced from the guru–*sishya* relationship—the relationship between teacher

and student—of ancient India. Rabindranath felt that without such a personal relationship between teachers and students a holistic education could not be imparted. He was able to hold on to this principle until his death. After him, his school and the Visva-Bhāratī University gradually lost their uniqueness as they got integrated into the framework of the governmental education system. Thus, the dependence on—and appreciation of—the personal was weakened. In some secret ways, I feel, it still does exist and exerts its influence, moulding those students who are receptive to it.

The overarching educational challenge in the Odenwaldschule–Ecole d'Humanité and Sāntiniketan is how to 'customize' the personal for a large and fluctuating community of young minds. This discourse flowed over into the larger question of how to preserve the purity and dignity of the personal in the global arena. Rabindranath Tagore and Paul Geheeb made their individual attempts, as we have seen, to preserve gravitas and depth, although they both, at times, 'played to the gallery' by associating themselves with 'big names' for the sake of being heard and taken seriously. Edith Geheeb, in contrast, renounced the global arena, remaining strictly bound to personal relationships. We do not see her conceptualizing global ideas and larger schemes, giving her name to international organizations, and so on. This she left to her husband.

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Note: A fairly large number of the letters and documents listed below were first identified and photocopied when I stayed at the Ecole d'Humanité in 1999 and 2000. After the archive of the Ecole shifted to the Hessische Staatsarchiv, Darmstadt, I made a note of the new file numbers and use them here. Only two documents I could not trace in Darmstadt; they are listed separately under 'Archive of the Ecole d'Humanité (AEH), Hasliberg Goldern'.

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Letter by Aurobindo Bose to Paul Geheeb, dated c.1929, from the Odenwaldschule (HLA HStAD O 37/985).

Letter by Aurobindo Bose to Paul Geheeb, dated 1 August 1929, no place (HLA HStAD O 37/985).

Letter by Edith Geheeb to A.C.N. Nambiar, dated 16 December 1952, from Hasliberg Goldern ('Schülerakte Rajiv und Sanjay Gandhi', HLA HStAD O 37/1131).

Letter by Edith Geheeb to Aurobindo Bose, dated 29 November 1965, from Bombay (HLA HStAD O 37/984).

Letter by Edith Geheeb to Aurobindo Bose, dated 3 December 1965, from Bombay (HLA HStAD O 37/984).

Letter by Edith Geheeb to Aurobindo Bose, dated 16 December 1965, from Kolkata (HLA HStAD O 37/984).

Letter by Edith Geheeb to Aurobindo Bose, dated 19 December 1965, from Santiniketan (HLA HStAD O 37/984).

Letter by Edith Geheeb to Aurobindo Bose, dated 22 December 1965, most likely from Kolkata. (HLA HStAD O 37/984).

Letter by Edith Geheeb to Aurobindo Bose, dated probably end of December 1965, most likely from Kolkata (HLA HStAD O 37/984).

Letter by Edith Geheeb to Aurobindo Bose, dated 2 January 1966, from Kolkata (HLA HStAD O 37/984).

Letter by Edith Geheeb to Aurobindo Bose, dated 3 January 1966, from Kolkata (HLA HStAD O 37/984).

Letter by Edith Geheeb to Aurobindo Bose, dated 12 January 1966, from New Delhi (HLA HStAD O 37/984).

Letter by Edith Geheeb to Aurobindo Bose, dated 16 January 1966, from Agra (HLA HStAD O 37/984).

Letter by Edith Geheeb to Dr Meyer, dated 13 March 1974, from Hasliberg Goldern (HLA HStAD O 37/984).

Letter by Edith Geheeb to Henry Cassirer, dated 15 April 1953, from Hasliberg Goldern (HLA HStAD O 37/255).

Letter by Edith Geheeb to Indira Gandhi, dated 26 February 1953, from Hasliberg Goldern ('Schülerakte Rajiv und Sanjay Gandhi', HLA HStAD O 37/1131).

Letter by Edith Geheeb to Indira Gandhi, dated 1 August 1953, from Hasliberg Goldern ('Schülerakte Rajiv und Sanjay Gandhi', HLA HStAD O 37/1131).

Letter by Edith Geheeb to Indira Gandhi, dated 16 June 1955, from Hasliberg Goldern ('Schülerakte Rajiv und Sanjay Gandhi', HLA HStAD O 37/1131).
Letter by Edith Geheeb to Indira Gandhi, dated 23 January 1962, from Hasliberg Goldern ('Schülerakte Rajiv und Sanjay Gandhi', HLA HStAD O 37/1131).
Letter by Edith Geheeb to Mr Oelbermann of the Rheinische Jugendburg, dated 29 July 1930, from the Odenwaldschule (HLA HStAD O 37/1130).
Letter by Edith Geheeb to Ninon Hesse, dated 23 August 1962, from Hasliberg Goldern (HLA HStAD O 37/660).
Letter by Edith Geheeb to Paul Geheeb, dated 2 October 1927, from Ascona (Casa Angolo) (HLA HStAD O 37/1043).
Letter by Edith Geheeb to Paul Geheeb, dated 17 October 1931, from Odenwaldschule, Heppenheim (HLA HStAD O 037 1046).
Letter by Edith Geheeb to Paul Geheeb, dated 24 September 1931, from the Odenwaldschule (HLA HStAD O 37/1046).
Letter by Edith Geheeb to Paul Geheeb, dated 29 December 1931, from the Odenwaldschule (HLA HStAD O 37/1046).
Letter by Edith Geheeb to Rabindranath Tagore, dated 1 October 1929, from the Odenwaldschule (HLA HStAD O 37/1130).
Letter by Edith Geheeb to Rabindranath Tagore, dated 28 August 1935, from the Institut Monnier at Versoix (HLA HStAD O 37/1130).
Letter by Edith Geheeb to Saumyendranath Tagore, dated 15 March 1966, no place (HLA HStAD O 37/992).
Letter by Edith Geheeb to Shrimati Tagore, dated 26 June 1963, from Hasliberg Goldern (HLA HStAD O 37/992).
Letter by Edith Geheeb to Shrimati Tagore, dated 16 December 1964, from Hasliberg Goldern (HLA HStAD O 37/992).
Letter by Edith Geheeb to Swami Nikhilananda, dated 29 June 1953, from Hasliberg Goldern (HLA HStAD O 37/978).
Letter by Edith Geheeb to Swami Nikhilananda, dated 6 October 1960, from Hasliberg Goldern (HLA HStAD O 37/978).
Letter by Edith Geheeb to Swami Nikhilananda, dated 25 March 1966, from Hasliberg Goldern (HLA HStAD O 37/978).
Letter by Edith Geheeb to Swami Yatiswarananda, dated 4 May 1953, from Hasliberg Goldern (HLA HStAD O 37/977).
Letter by Edith Geheeb to Swami Yatiswarananda, dated 8 April 1957, from Hasliberg Goldern (HLA HStAD O 37/977).
Letter by Edith Geheeb to V.N. and Ellen Sharma, dated 18 October 1965, from Hasliberg Goldern (HLA HStAD O 37/987).
Letter by Emma von Pelet to Edith Geheeb, dated 20 March 1962, from Casa Shanti, Ascona (HLA HStAD O 37/973).

Letter by Emma von Pelet to Edith Geheeb, dated 3 August 1966, from Casa Shanti, Ascona (HLA HStAD O 37/973).
Letter by Hermann Hesse to Aurobindo Bose, no date (received on 18 January 1960), from Montagnola (HLA HStAD O 37/660).
Letter by Indira Gandhi to Edith Geheeb, dated 18 February 1955, from New Delhi ('Schülerakte Rajiv und Sanjay Gandhi', HLA HStAD O 37/1131).
Letter by Indira Gandhi to Paul Geheeb, dated 31 March 1960, from New Delhi (HLA HSTAD O 37/500).
Letter by Jawaharlal Nehru to Paul Geheeb, dated 22 March 1960, from New Delhi (HLA HStAD O 37/974).
Letter by Paul Geheeb to Adolph Ferrière, dated 21 June 1929, from the Odenwaldschule (HLA HStAD O 37/995).
Letter by Paul Geheeb to Adolphe Ferrière, dated 25 November 1927, from the Odenwaldschule (HLA HStAD O 37/995).
Letter by Paul Geheeb to Edith Geheeb, dated 24 December 1927, from Tyrolia (HLA HStAD O 37/1043).
Letter by Paul Geheeb to Edith Geheeb, dated 3 August 1930, from Neuchâtel (HLA HStAD O 37/1130).
Letter by Paul Geheeb to Edith Geheeb, dated 11 October 1931, from Les Pléiades sur Blonay (HLA HStAD O 037 1046).
Letter by Paul Geheeb to Edith Geheeb, dated 14 October 1931, from Les Pléiades (HLA HStAD O 037 1046).
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Letter by Paul Geheeb to Romain Rolland, dated 4 May 1928, no place (HLA HStAD O 37/975).
Letter by Paul Geheeb to Romain Rolland, dated 28 January 1939, from Les Pléiades sur Blonay (HLA HStAD O 37/875).
Letter by Pratima Tagore to Edith Geheeb, dated 25 December 1965, from Santiniketan (HLA HStAD O 37/992).
Letter by Rabindranath Tagore to Edith Geheeb, dated 17 September 1935, from Santiniketan (HLA HStAD O 37/1130).
Letter by Rabindranath Tagore to Paul Geheeb, dated 8 August 1936, from Santiniketan (HLA HStAD O 37/1130).
Letter by Saumyendranath Tagore to Edith Geheeb, dated 16 March 1963, from Calcutta (HLA HStAD O 37/992).
Letter by Shrimati Hutheesing to Paul Geheeb, dated 3 October 1927, from Berlin (HLA HStAD O 37/992).
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Letter by Shrimati Hutheesing to Paul Geheeb, dated 15 September 1933, from Ahmedabad (HLA HStAD O 37/992).

Letter by Shrimati Tagore to Edith Geheeb, dated 26 November 1962, from Paris (HLA HStAD O 37/992).

Letter by Shrimati Tagore to Edith Geheeb, dated 21 September 1963, from 'Bombay on way to Calcutta' (HLA HStAD O 37/992).

Letter by Shrimati Tagore to Paul Geheeb, dated 25 May 1937, from Ahmedabad (HLA HStAD O 37/992).

Letter by Swami Nikhilananda to Edith Geheeb, no date, from New York (HLA HStAD O 37/978).

Letter by Swami Nikhilananda to Edith Geheeb, dated 7 January 1935, from New York (HLA HStAD O 37/978).

Letter by Swami Nikhilananda to Edith Geheeb, dated 8 August 1946, from New York (HLA HStAD O 37/978).

Letter by Swami Nikhilananda to Edith Geheeb, dated 12 April 1947, from New York (HLA HStAD O 37/978).

Letter by Swami Yatiswarananda to Edith Geheeb, dated 6 July 1935, from Wiesbaden (HLA HStAD O 37/977).

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Letter by Swami Yatiswarananda to Edith Geheeb, dated 30 December 1965, from Belur Math (HLA HStAD O 37/977).

Letter by V.N. Sharma to Paul Geheeb, dated 2[?] October 1931, from the Odenwaldschule, Heppenheim (HLA HStAD O 37/986).

Picture postcard by A.C. Chakravarty to 'Dear & Respected friends' [Paul and Edith Geheeb], dated 2 September 1930, from Arley Castle (HLA HStAD O 37/1130).

Picture postcard by A.C. Chakravarty to 'Dear & Respected Friends' [Paul and Edith Geheeb], dated 15 September 1930, from Moscow (HLA HStAD O 37/1130).

Postcard by Ellen Sharma to Edith Geheeb, no date [1937?], from Madras (HLA HStAD O 37/986).

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About the Author

Martin Kämpchen, born in Germany, obtained a PhD in German literature and theatre from Vienna, studied a year each in the USA and in Paris, and then shifted to Kolkata as a teacher of German in 1973. He returned to university to study Indian philosophy in Chennai and, subsequently, comparative religion at Visva-Bhāratī, Sāntiniketan, West Bengal, obtaining a second PhD. He stayed on in Sāntiniketan to translate Tagore's poetry from Bengali to German, write his biography, and research on his relationship with Germany. He has also translated Srī Rāmakrishna's conversations from Bengali. Kämpchen has been active in the field of Indo-German intercultural relations and in Hindu–Christian dialogue. His many books in German, English, and Bengali include academic studies, anthologies, fiction, diaries, and essays. He contributes to Indian and German newspapers regularly. Since the last thirty years, he has been working among the Santal tribals near Sāntiniketan.

In 1930, when Rabindranath Tagore met Paul and Edith Geheeb in Germany, they formed a fruitful and long-term association resulting in the exchange of ideas and vision. Tagore's Brahmāchārya Āshram, founded in 1901 in Sāntiniketan, and the Odenwaldschule of the Geheebs, established in Germany in 1910 (thereafter the Ecole d'Humanité in Switzerland, established in 1934 after the couple fled Nazi Germany), emerged from vastly different cultural backgrounds and social exigencies. Yet, they recognized striking similarities between their educational endeavours. The meeting also initiated a close association between India and Germany, with the Geheebs attracting many Indian intellectuals and Indophile Germans to their schools.

This book explores the areas where the lives of the Geheebs and Tagore, and their respective circles, overlap. Rather than being a biography, a history, or a comprehensive description, this study is a comparison of Tagore and the Geheebs and their schools. Making use of the repository of unpublished correspondence available at the Ecole's archive, the author studies the Indo-German cultural exchanges in the early twentieth century that were initiated by these three educators and their pedagogical vision.

Martin Kämpchen is a literature scholar, author, translator, and journalist whose work focuses on German–Indian cultural exch

Front cover

Back cover image: Rabindranath Tago[illegible] Paul Geheeb in Germany in 1930. Courtesy of archive at Ecole d'Humanité, Switzerland.

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